

北山結莉

Yuri Kitayama

Illustrator ◆ Riv

3

✿ 決別の鎮魂歌

精霊
幻想記

【せいれいげんそうき】





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Chapter 30: In the Footsteps of His Parents

Over half a year had passed since Rio left the Seirei no Tami village. Rio's mobility had significantly improved thanks to being able to fly using Spirit Arts. He arrived in Yagumo in merely a week after departing from the Seirei no Tami village.

Yagumo was the general name for the Eastern regions of the Yufilia continent. It contained over 30 countries widely varying in size. Unlike Strahl, where the Bertram and Galark Kingdoms are situated, organizations such as the Adventurer's Guild and Merchant's Guild did not exist in Yagumo. As such, the circulated currency was different¹. In addition, the common language used in Yagumo differed from the one used in Strahl.

Fortunately, the head elder of the Seirei no Tami, Arthura, had spent a considerable amount of time in Yagumo before and was able to teach Rio Yagumo's native tongue. Although his pronunciation was still slightly awkward, Rio had no trouble holding an everyday conversation.

Rio exhaustively investigated each country in Yagumo for any information pertaining to his parents, inquiring the locals if they were acquainted with his parents.

Unfortunately, Rio did not have any hints as to which country his parents were from. The only information he had were their names and that they came originally from Yagumo. Thus, the effectiveness of his search was significantly hampered.

There were over 30 countries of varying sizes in Yagumo.

Trying to obtain information about two people from that many countries was like trying to find a needle in a haystack; in other words, it was incredibly

difficult.

Roughly spending one to two months in each country, he was already on his fourth.

Countries in Yagumo characteristically consisted of a single large city surrounded by a number of smaller towns and villages.

Currently, Rio was heading towards Karasuki, the capital of the country he was in. Along the way, he came across a slightly large village near the capital. According to information he gathered, Karasuki was by the far the largest and most populous city he would encounter thus far².

There was a higher possibility of gaining hints about his parents than the other cities.

Even if he could not question every single person there, Rio considered staying a bit longer in Karasuki.

However, it was still necessary to gather information in the village he was coming up on.

Judging from the number of houses, Rio estimated the village to have a population of around 300.

A fence surrounded the village with shabby looking houses made of wood, limestone, and clay dotting the center.

Surrounding the residential area were open fields and pastures with barns scattered around. Here and there, Rio saw people working the land and feeding their livestock.

It was the scene of a typical rural village that could be found anywhere.

Rio proceeded towards the entrance to the village.

Although there were not any guards on watch so one could come and go freely, the nearby villagers recognized Rio as an outsider and watched him from a distance.

It was an atmosphere that would make an outsider hesitate to proceed further, but Rio could not simply just turn around and leave.

Rio pressed his way forward, towards the village to quickly finish what he came for.

Upon reaching the center of the village, Rio surveyed the surrounding buildings. Discovering a house larger than the rest, he assumed it to be the village chief's

residence and walked towards it.

「E~tto, a guest? You don't seem like a peddler, nor do you look like a Samurai-sama or Warrior-sama... right? Are you a Ronin³...? Or possibly a traveller?」

A girl who appeared to be around Rio's age called out to him with a curious look.

This is unusual.

Was Rio's thoughts.

For the most part, villagers avoided speaking to him unless he initiated a conversation.

Even then, they would usually adopt a hostile or wary attitude.

The girl's clothes were simple. The appearance of her skin was rough and dry, most likely due to farm work, and her hair was cut short, which suited her quite well. Overall, she was a girl with lovely features and a friendly demeanour.

Speaking of which, Samurai were the equivalent of Knights in the Bertram and Galark Kingdoms.

Warriors were distinguished soldiers who had ascended through the ranks and reported directly to Samurais.

Lastly, Ronins were comparable to Adventurers.

Although Rio was armed, his appearance was quite different from that of a typical Samurai or Warrior in the region.

Rather, his armaments were a far cry away from those used in the region.

From these facts, the girl speculated Rio was a traveller from some distant foreign land.

「Yes, it's something like that. Actually, I'm looking for someone. I'd like to speak to the village chief. Is this by any chance the chief's residence?」

「Ah, ye— yes. That's right but...」

To Rio's courteous conduct unthinkable for a Ronin or a traveller, the girl replied in a stiff voice.

「Thank god. Is the village chief currently home?」

「Uhm, yes. She, is?」

Tilting her head, the girl replied with a question for some reason. Perhaps she

was not well versed in formal speech⁴.

「If you don't mind, can I trouble you to guide me there? It would be quite disrespectful for me to suddenly barge into someone's home.」

Rio spoke in a slightly troubled tone.

Even though the village chief acts as a mediator between the village and foreigners, if a complete outsider were to suddenly show up, suspicion would arise, as Rio had experienced many times before.

The girl's presence would allow Rio to smoothly converse with the village chief.

「Ah, of course! Then, uhm, please follow me.」

The girl agreed to Rio's request without a hint of irritation.

Guided by the girl, Rio arrived at the village chief's house.

Maybe it was because she was nervous but she remained silent for the whole way. Occasionally, she would steal glances at Rio.

As Rio wondered if outsiders other than peddlers who came to the village were that rare, the two arrive at the village chief's house.

「Obaa-chan! There's a guest~! He said he's looking for someone~」

When they entered the house, the girl loudly called for the village chief. A spacious room with a fireplace positioned in the center greeted them.

「You don't have to speak so loudly, I can hear you just fine. A guest, is it? Not a peddler? ...Oya, you... I haven't seen your face before.」

An elderly woman appeared from within the house. She directed a dubious glance at Rio's exotic appearance.

「Greetings, it's a pleasure to meet you. I am called Rio. Pleased to make your acquaintance.」

Rio politely introduced himself in an accustomed manner.

「Rio... the same name as the old King. Sorry, I'm Yuba. Setting aside whether or not we'll become acquainted after this, what sort of business do you have in such a rural village?」

Although polite, the elderly woman introducing herself as Yuba spoke in a doubtful tone.

Rio laughed bitterly in his mind as he was already expecting to be doubted. Rio decided to ask his usual question in order to quickly wrap up his business.

「Well, I'll get straight to the point. Do you happen to know of a man and woman called Zen and Ayame? They should have lived in Yagumo up until 15 years or so ago.」

Rio inquired about the names of the two people he was looking for.
Zen and Ayame.

They were the names of Rio's father and mother.

How many times had he asked that same question already?

He had yet to receive a favourable answer.

Even though it was highly likely that he would receive the same, unfavourable answer, Rio could not help but hold onto a sliver of hope that this time, this time he would hear the words he had been waiting for.

If the answer was negative, he would leave the village immediately.

However, this time his expectations did not betray him.

「...Zen? Did you just say Zen? And Ayame-sama too...」

Yuba's reaction was vastly different from those Rio had seen up until now. This elderly woman obviously knew something. Indeed, it was the reaction he had been looking for.

「Are you acquainted with them!?!」

For the Rio who was rarely agitated, he unconsciously asked in rather loud voice.

「...You, who are you?」

Yuba stared directly at Rio as if to confirm something.

「...I am their son.」

Rio was slightly worried whether he should reveal the truth so easily but since he was asked, he decided it was best to answer honestly. Thinking so, Rio answered her question.

「Their son... You are...」

Yuba's expression darkened as she stared intently at Rio, as if trying to find

something.

「...Ruri, leave us for a moment.」

Yuba dismissed the girl called Ruri who was attentively listening on their conversation on the side.

「Eeh~ Why~?」

Ruri voiced her complaint while puffing her cheeks in annoyance.

「Just go already. I have something important to discuss with this child. And don't say a word to anybody in the village about what you just heard.」

「Eh~? I understand but... che. Just when it starts to become interesting.」

Ruri left the house while grumbling her complaints.

「Finally. You, you said your name was Rio right? Was what you said just now the truth?」

Having confirmed that Ruri left the house, Yuba turned a sharp gaze at Rio.

「About what I said before, do you mean about me being the son of Zen and Ayame?」

「Yes.」

Yuba gave a brief affirmation.

「It is true. Though, I don't have anything to prove that. Since I don't have any memories of father, the best I can do is describe my mother's features and recall stories I heard of my father when he was still alive. Is that alright?」

「I'm sorry but please, tell me. I'm not yet convinced that you're their son.」

Rio perceived signs of doubt lingering in Yuba's eyes.

「I see. I can certainly do that. Then, I will tell you all I know.」

Rio began to describe his mother's characteristics as well as talk about his recollections of his father.

Yuba kept silent throughout Rio's entire story.

By the middle of Rio's reminiscence, Yuba quietly watched Rio with traces of nostalgia on her face.

「...I'm sorry for doubting you. I do believe you are their son.」

After talking for some time, an expression of understanding finally surfaced on Yuba's face and she acknowledged Rio as the son of Zen and Ayame.

「No, don't be. Even I'd find it difficult to believe if a person suddenly appeared out of nowhere and proclaimed they're the son of acquaintances of mine who left over 20 years ago.」

Rio nodded slightly, agreeing with Yuba's previous doubts.

「I'm thankful for that. You resemble Ayame-sama. A part of me was ready to believe you but I wanted more evidence. So, how are Zen and Ayame-sama fairing?」

Yuba asked in a slightly quickened tone.
She could not help but worry about the two's well-being.
This person was not only acquainted with Zena and Ayame, she was also worried about them and yet, she had not received news of their passing yet.

「Father died shortly after I was born. Mother passed away during my childhood...」

While answering her question, Rio saw that Yuba could not conceal her curiosity and wondered what kind of relationship she had with his parents.

「...I see. That child has already passed away, huh? Sheesh...」

An air of loneliness could be felt from her.

「About that... May I know the relationship between you and my father?」

Rio posed the question to Yuba.

「I'm that child's mother.」

Having already expected such a response, Rio felt neither confusion nor surprise.

「I, see... Then would that make you my grandmother?」

Rio smiled wryly whilst feeling slightly nervous to have met a blood relative other than his parents for the first time.

「Ah, that is indeed correct. It's an odd feeling. But, I'm glad you're alive and well. It must've been hard for you up until now.」

Released from her earlier tension, Yuba looked at Rio with a gentle expression.

「Well, it was difficult in its own ways. But thanks to that, I managed to survive until now.」

Reacting to Yuba's gaze, Rio expressed a vague smile. What was Rio's life like until now? What were his circumstances? His feelings? Yuba was unable to understand any of those from his expression alone.

「I see... Then, did the two manage to reach the Western end?」

The Western end likely referred to Strahl.

「They did. I was born in a country there.」

「I see. I'm glad to hear that. To have given birth to you, the two must've been happy.」

「That is... yes. I also think so.」

His father died during a quest while his mother was murdered after being raped. Memories of the past flashed through his head for an instant causing Rio to hesitate in the middle of his words.

「...I see. I'm, glad. ...So, you've journeyed here all the way from the west, right? Why did you undertake such a perilous journey?」

Despite noticing the subtle change in Rio's expression from her long years of experience, Yuba did not want to pry too deeply and instead asked for his reason in coming to such a distant land.

「I want to erect a grave for my parents here...」

Although Rio did not have any mementos belonging to his parents, he thought they would be happier to have their grave in their hometown rather than in a foreign land where they met their end.

「...Actually, a grave for them has already been made.」

Words Rio never expected to hear came from Yuba's mouth.

「Their graves... have already been made?」

Rio could not understand her words.

It was not impossible to erect a grave for someone while they are still alive. However, a grave would only be made on the assumption that they would die there.

Zen and Ayame, Rio's parents, spent years on a dangerous journey and eventually reached the other side of the continent.

Despite existing on the same continent, inhabitants of Strahl and Yagumo hardly knew anything about the other region besides its name.

Were the two intending on returning to their hometown?

As far back as he could remember, Rio did not recall his mother showing any signs of wanting to return to Yagumo.

In the first place, why did Zen and Ayame leave? If Rio knew the reason for their departure, he would have a much better picture of the situation. He could not think of a plausible reason even if he tried but there was somebody who possibly knew right before him.

Rio voiced the question that was currently bothering him.

「Why did father and mother leave Yagumo?」

「You weren't told...?」

Yuba muttered with a troubled expression.

Rio thought that if it was her, she would at least know something about his parents' circumstances. At his question, Yuba slowly opened her mouth.

「...I'm sorry but, I, myself, am unable to tell you.」

Yuba regretfully apologized to him.

「The only thing I can say is, the two were notable fugitives and are considered dead by this country. A small grave was built for them on the outskirts of the village.」

Rio was only able to glean a couple scraps of information about his parents.

「They were... fugitives?」

Rio's tone was one of bewilderment.

What in the world did they do?

Rio was curious but he did not feel like Yuba would answer him even if he begged, nor would forcibly extracting the information be a good idea.

There was nothing he could do but give up for now.

「I will guide you to Zen and Ayame-sama's grave for the time being. Will you be holding a memorial service for them?」

When Rio kept silent, Yuba offered to guide him to their grave.

「By all means, please. I came all the way here for that reason after all...」

Straightening his back, Rio responded with a smile.

When they left the village chief's house, they came upon a small hill on the outskirts of the village.

It was a peaceful area overlooking the whole village and the land around it. Two simple stone pillars stood there all by their lonesome. It was clear that they were routinely maintained as not a speck of dirt could be seen on either pillar nor were there any signs of weathering.

「Here are Zen's and Ayama-sama's grave. Although their bones aren't buried here, their mementos are.」

Yuba looked down at the stone pillars with a gentle expression.

「I'm the only one in the village who knows that these graves belong to Zen and Ayame-sama. To begin with, the other villagers don't even know that these are graves. Please keep this a secret from the villagers as well as Ruri.」

「...I understand.」

Despite being unable to fully grasp the situation, Rio acknowledged her request with a slight nod.

「Perhaps one day, I will be able to tell you what happened.」

Rio could understand what Yuba meant as she muttered such a thing. For an instant, Rio redirected his gaze from the stone pillars to Yuba.

「That's why, until that day arrives, would you like to live in this village?」

It was an expression overflowing with affection, setting Rio's mind at ease.

「Is it alright for me to live here?」

Rio blinked at her offer.

「You're my grandson you know. A grandchild shouldn't act so reserved before

his grandparent.」

Her lips curved into a bright smile as she spoke.

「There are plenty of vacant rooms in my house. Ruri's father died in war while her mother passed away from an epidemic. Only that child and I live in there now.」

Yuba spoke with a hint of loneliness.

「Ruri-san? She is...」

Predicting the type of relation he had with her, Rio raised a question.

「Your cousin. She'll be turning 15 this year.」

Yuba finished the sentence for him.

「Is that so...? And I'm to keep this a secret from her as well right?」

「Indeed. That child doesn't know that she has a cousin.」

Receiving the response he expected, Rio nodded at Yuba's words.

「Understood. Then, I will be in your care during my stay here. Please take care of me.」

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- 1. TL : Western region of the Yufilia continent where the Demon-God War took place ☐
 - 2. TL : referring to cities in Yagumo region ☐
 - 3. TL : masterless samurai, or a re-taker or me ☐
 - 4. ED: Basically she replies with "Arimasu, desu?". "Arimasu" translates to "[subject] is" with "desu" being added to make the sentence polite (formal speech always ends with "desu"). She hesitates and questioningly adds "desu", hence her lack of familiarity with formal speech. ☐
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ED: Some thoughts about the chapter. So it's the opening of Arc 3 and numerous questions are instantly raised. Most prominent is the question: What did Rio's parents do? I haven't read ahead but from the clues given, it's pretty obvious what they did. Hint: Why does Yuba refer to Ayame as Ayame-sama? In other news, another arc, another bunch of flags to break.

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Chapter 31: Life in the Village Part 1

The following day, Rio began his life in the village where his father, Zen, formerly resided.

Thinking it would be rude to freeload, Rio offered to help around the village during his stay.

Morning began early in the village.

Rio woke up before sunrise and made his way to the Yuba house's living room¹.

「Oya, you're up quite early.」

Yuba was already up and sat on a chair while stoking the fire.

「*Yawn* Good morning Obaa-chan~」

Still half asleep, Ruri entered the room.

「Good morning. You, have you forgotten? Rio's also here.」

Yuba smiled wryly at Ruri whose disordered sleepwear revealed traces of her underwear.

One year older than Rio, her body leaned towards the thinner side due to the daily farm work and slight malnourishment, but it still held the feminine grace of a woman. Her well-endowed breasts could be seen peeping out from her disheveled upper half.

「Eh... Ah!!!」

Ruri finally noticed the boy in front of her who had started living with them since the day before.

Although Rio had already averted his gaze, Ruri's face became as red as a ripe apple when she realised that, even for a moment, he saw her indecent appearance.



「うーん、お婆ちゃん。おはよう」

ルリが寝間着を兼ねた肌着姿のまま、
寝惚け眼で居間に姿を現した。

「I— I'll go change my clothes!」

Parting with those words, Ruri dashed out of the room. She returned to the room after a few minutes but was glaring at Rio.

(I'm not the one at fault here but, well, it can't be helped...)

Trying his best to avoid her gaze, a cramped smile formed on Rio's face.

「So, since you got up so early, are you intending to lend us a hand? Will you be open to helping with whatever we need?」

Perhaps intending to clear away the awkward atmosphere between Rio and Ruri, Yuba chuckled while asking Rio.

「Yes, leave it to me.」

Wanting to escape from the awkward atmosphere, Rio quickly gave a reply to Yuba's question.

「Well, even if you say so, what can you do? Since depending on what you're good at, the work I'll give you might differ.」

While only for a limited amount of time, additional manpower was secured and Yuba's expression was that of a village chief considering how to most effectively maximize her efficiency.

「Cooking, farming, hunting, construction, compounding medicine and lastly, although I don't want to stand out too much, I can wield Spirit Arts.」

Rio's skillset increased substantially during his stay in the Seirei no Tami village.

He could even do construction work from the knowledge he gained from the dwarfs and compound medicine for common illnesses from training under the elves as long as the required ingredients were available.

Yuba and Ruri dumbfoundedly stared at Rio as he recited his skills one after the other.

「Well, it isn't conspicuous since it's not strange for the son of Zen and Ayame-sama to also be a... Spirit Arts user. Still, your other skills aren't a lie right? It's fine even if you don't exaggerate.」

Being able to do something and actually producing results were two greatly different things.

Much of the work assigned to the men of the village involved physical labour such as farming, hunting and construction. They were not jobs that an amateur could suddenly start doing.

In the worst case, if Rio was just putting on airs, he could negatively influence other people's productivity.

「Yes, there's no problem.」

Rio answered without hesitation.

「I see. Then I'll take your word for it. To start, let's introduce you to the other villagers. Ruri, bring Rio along with you for your morning ingredients bartering and use the opportunity to introduce him as well.」

Perhaps because Rio's unwavering confidence could be felt, Yuba decided to believe him for the time being.

And so, Yuba instructed Ruri to introduce Rio to the villagers.

「E~tto, okay. Then, Rio... let's go?」

With a tinge of embarrassment, likely stemming from having had her shameful appearance seen earlier, Ruri called out to Rio in a slightly bashful voice.

「Yeah, please treat me well.」

When the two left the village chief's house they first stopped by the kitchen garden, which was raised separately from the fields managed by the village, to harvest ingredients.

A portion was set aside for use at home with the rest being put into a basket.

「Bartering is how we exchange goods in the village. We harvest ingredients for our meals in the morning and gather in the plaza to trade with other families.」

Ruri explained the way the village operated to Rio.

「I see...」

Rio glanced at the previously harvested vegetables in the basket in admiration.

Although taxes were imposed on each village, only ingredients harvested from the village managed farm were taxed.

While discussing the workings of the village, the two approached the village square.

A plaza approximately the size of a small schoolyard was situated in the center of the village, lined by simple wooden houses with straw roofs on either side. The women of the village had already assembled in the plaza and were exchanging greetings and swapping gossip.

「Good morning everybody!」

Ruri gave a cheerful greeting to all the people gathered.

When the women noticed Ruri's presence, they returned light greetings with a smile. However, upon noticing the figure of an unfamiliar man by her side, they immediately shifted their gazes towards him.

「This is Rio. Since yesterday, he has started living with us. He's 14 years old, the son of an old acquaintance of Obaa-chan. I brought him along to introduce him to everyone since he'll be helping around the village starting today.」

「As you've heard, my name is Rio. Although I'm still lacking in many areas, please take care of me from now on.」

In an effort to leave a good impression, Rio politely greeted everyone with a perfect smile.

A courteous introduction, namely his posture and wording, was Rio's method of creating harmonious relations.

If the other party is greeted with courtesy, they would likely also return the courtesy. It was something Rio always kept in mind whenever introducing himself.

「E~tto, nice to meet you...」

Taken aback by Rio's overly formal introduction, the women awkwardly returned his greeting.

「You don't need to speak so politely like a noble-sama. You'll make everyone nervous if a boy like Rio spoke in such a manner.」

Ruri advised him as though she had experienced it before.

For the women who were constantly surrounded solely by rowdy, rough men, they found Rio highly attractive with his handsome features and androgynous face.

If such a person spoke in a formal tone, it would be no surprise for them to become nervous due to embarrassment.

「Haha, well, I'll do my best. I'll work on it gradually.」

Having already made his introduction using formal speech, Rio thought it would be unnatural to suddenly change his speech without a good reason. As it stood, it would be best to change it little by little.

Rio smiled bitterly while thinking so as the women directed questioning gazes at Ruri.

They were without a doubt, wondering who this stunning man was.

Ruri flinched under their gazes which were similar to that of a carnivore not allowing its prey to escape.

The eyes of the unmarried young women were especially intense.

(Ha, haha... Well, I already thought it'd turn out like this but... Uu~h, I'll definitely be interrogated later.)

Ruri still hardly knew anything about Rio since she was still incredibly nervous about living together with him.

When she returned home after work the day before, her grandmother suddenly told her that Rio would start living together with them.

She was only told that he was the son of one of Yuba's old acquaintances.

It was not strange for Yuba, with her extensive network, to be acquainted with somebody from outside the village, but there was still no way she could not be surprised when somebody of the opposite sex and in her same age group started living together with them.

On top of all that, Rio was incredibly handsome, courteous and composed.

The day before, when Ruri saw him by chance and offered to guide him thinking he was a visitor, she became fascinated at his handsome appearance².

If even someone as sociable as herself became nervous, it was no surprise that the young women of the village also felt the same.

For Ruri who had only dealt with crude men until now, she was at a loss at how to conduct herself around a man like Rio.

The eyes of the young women flicked between Rio and Ruri ever since a little while ago.

Ruri became depressed when she imagined the barrage of questions that would inevitably come her way during work after breakfast.

She sent a fleeting glance at Rio.

Using only their eyes, Ruri and the women carried a silent conversation between themselves. It was only possible because they were all women and had been long time acquaintances.

Drawing glances from the young women, Rio stood by in confusion.

Suddenly, Rio's gaze overlapped with Ruri's.

(Uuu~h, I really can't understand him~)

Ruri's face slightly reddened when she remembered that she was seen in her underwear not too long ago.

Noticing her reddened face, the women, with their sharp intuition, sensed something was amiss.

Even without asking, they had all arrived at the same conclusion.

「Haa~ let's finish today's bartering quickly. Everyone needs to return home and make breakfast.」

Ruri made up an excuse to return quickly.

Letting out a small sigh, the embarrassed Ruri started dividing the ingredients. She exchanged their ingredients with ingredients from other household's kitchen gardens and the contents of their basket changed surprisingly quickly.

「Alright then, shall we return, Rio?」

After confirming that their task was complete, Ruri quickly called out to Rio who was carrying the basket containing the newly acquired ingredients. Although the women seemed to want to talk to Rio, none of them could find an opportunity since they were all watching each other's moves.

Ignoring the piercing glares of the other women, Ruri quickly returned home with Rio.

「Obaa-chan, I'm back!」

「I've returned.」

When Ruri cheerfully announced her return, Rio also followed suit.

「Welcome back.」

It seemed that Yuba had already prepared the utensils and firewood for cooking and was waiting for their return.

「Let me help with the cooking. I was also able to obtain a variety of seasonings and ingredients during my travels so please feel free to use them.」

The ingredients were from the five years worth of food Rio received as a gift from Arthura, which also included a generous amount of seasonings. Of course, if he took out all the food at once, it would raise questions over where he kept all of it.

Therefore, Rio decided to deceive them by moving a reasonable amount of ingredients and seasonings to his backpack beforehand.

「That'd be a huge help since we're particularly short on seasonings.」

The village was completely dependent on peddlers who regularly stopped by the village for a supply of seasonings, especially salt.

The price of salt was quite high when compared to the prices in the city because of the peddlers' transportation efforts. As a result, it was difficult to purchase large quantities at a time and was highly valued in the village.

Therefore, given its shortages, seasonings were prioritized over ingredients. Even if there were an abundance of ingredients, if there were no seasonings, the food would be incredibly bland.

With that in mind, Rio returned to his room and retrieved ingredients as well as a considerable amount of salt from his Item Box. He stuffed them all into his back and returned to hall that was connected to the kitchen.

「For the time being, here's the salt.」

A bag of salt weighting over 10 kg was removed from the backpack and placed on the table.

「Fu~n, you have that much salt?」

「Uwaa~ so much salt³, I doubt we'll run out anytime soon with just us. Won't this last us two years if used sparingly?」

Yuba and Ruri stared in amazement at the size of the bag.

「I also have some seasonings I made myself as well as a lot of dried meat.」

As it would be odd for a someone who had been continuously on the move up

until now to have freshly harvested vegetables in their possession, Rio chose a few preserved food items and added them to his backpack.

Meat was considered a luxury so he focused on the dried meat.

「Still, I'm impressed that you were able to carry that much. Despite your outward appearance, you're quite strong.」

While Rio was tall and well built, he had a thin frame.

Yuba expressed amazement because he did not seem all that strong with his clothes on.

「My travels alone aren't just for show you know.」

Rio smiled wryly at Yuba's words.

「Anyway, shall we make breakfast? Seeing that rice and soup have already been prepared, should I make something suitable with the dried meat and vegetables I brought? This would be perfect with pickled vegetables.」

Instead of bread, rice and grains were the staple foods for Yagumo.

However, as they did not perform selective breeding⁴, the quality of the rice and grains fell short when compared to those grown in the Seirei no Tami village.

In addition, it was much easier to reproduce Japanese cuisine in Yagumo than in Stahl thanks to the existence of a lot of seasonings like miso.

「Yosh. Then let's gauge Rio's skills by having him prepare breakfast. Ruri, watch over him in case something happens.」

「Sure thing~」

Ruri responded cheerfully after hearing the assigned meal responsibilities and Rio began to cook.

Meals were taken twice a day in the village, once in the morning and once in the evening.

Breakfast was abundant in order to build up energy for the day while dinner tended to be light, unless there was a banquet.

「Ooh. You really can use Spirit Arts! I didn't think you could.」

Ruri became excited when Rio ignited the firewood using Spirit Arts.

If this was the first time she saw Spirit Arts, then her reaction was quite lacking.

「Is this your first time seeing Spirit Arts?」

Rio decided to ask Ruri since she seemed oddly acquainted with Spirit Arts.

「Not at all. Actually, I can also use Spirit Arts. If it's just in this village, then Obaa-chan can use it too.」

Although Ruri's response was slightly unexpected, Rio now understood why she did not express much surprise upon seeing his use of Spirit Arts.

「Oh, I see. Did you learn Spirit Arts from Yuba?」

「Yeah. For some reason, our family seems to possess a high aptitude for Spirit Arts among commoners. It's part of the reason why Obaa-chan is the village chief.」

If that was the case, then just as Rio suspected, Zen was also a Spirit Arts user. Rio boiled the rice which was already soaked in water while he and Ruri were out greeting the villagers. For the miso soup, he poured water into a pan and added kombu and dried bonito while heating over a low flame to create the dashi⁵.

「You're really used to cooking aren't you? The men in the village could really learn a thing or two from you.」

Ruri spoke in admiration while watching him cook. The common belief in the village was that only women performed household chores. The men could not even create basic meals⁶. For Ruri who had been raised in the village, seeing a man cook for once was very refreshing.

「It's no big deal. I wouldn't have survived my travels if I couldn't at least do this much.」

Rio never stopped moving his hands even while talking to Ruri. While waiting for the dashi and rice to finish, Rio chopped the mushrooms and vegetables before also slicing up the dried meat.

「Uwaa, your skill with a knife is even better than mine...」

Ruri's face cramped as she voiced her amazement. Rio smiled wryly at her attempt at creating small talk.

She had lost most of her tension from before.

Rio had the impression that she was quite an open-minded individual.

「It seems like the rice will be done soon.」

Rio removed the pot containing the rice from the fire since it smelled slightly burnt.

To steam the rice, Rio left the pot as it was without removing the lid. In the meantime, he filtered the broth into a separate pot with the mushrooms and vegetables and boiled it⁷.

Afterwards, the sliced dried meat and minced vegetables were stir-fried together, seasoned and served on a plate.

Rio lightly stirred the miso that had begun to boil. He removed it from the fire and carried it to the hearth in the hall⁸.

「It's done.」

Rio removed the lid from the pot containing the rice to reveal the perfectly cooked rice.

He scooped the rice into separate bowls and poured the miso soup into another set of wooden bowls while the remaining dishes were placed on the table.

「Uwaa, these look delicious. There's also an additional dish thanks to the dried meat Rio brought! What a great day!」

Ruri spoke with a cheerful expression.

It seemed like she was pleased with the food's appearance.

「If you can make all of these, then it'd be fine for you to be in charge of cooking, right?」

Yuba also seemed satisfied with the results of Rio's cooking.

「Then let's eat before it cools!」

When the three took their seats around the table, Ruri impatiently signalled the start of the meal.

「Mmm~! This miso soup is incredibly delicious. The taste of the dashi is perfect. This stir-fry is also great!」

Seeing Ruri float a blissful expression for every dish she tasted made Rio think

it was well worth the effort he put into preparing the food.

「Aah, you really are quite skillful. That's a relief.」

Yuba also tasted each of Rio's dishes.

「I'm truly grateful to hear that.」

Rio smiled at their favourable impressions.

「Now then, Rio, after we finish breakfast, I'll guide you to where you'll be helping out. For the time being I intend to have you help with hunting, but will you be alright with that?」

In the middle of their meal, Yuba suddenly posed a question for Rio. It was regarding the work he would start assisting with today.

「That's fine, please leave it to me.」

While thinking what kind of life he would lead from today onwards, Rio quietly nodded at Yuba's words.

-
1. TL: he's waking up as fast as me ☐
 2. TL : Riajuu just EXPLODE!!!! ED: Mr. Perfect... (¬_¬;) PF: now waiting for a masochist to appear ☐
 3. ED: Not as much salt as the Kancolle event ☐
 4. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Selective_breeding ☐
 5. Bonito: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bonito> / Konbu: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kombu> / Dashi: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dashi> ☐
 6. TL : what useless men; ED: I can make instant noodles... >.> PF: not much better than them] ☐
 7. TL: the trick for cooking rice is after it boiled till the water vaporized, you let it rest for a while and waiting for all the water to vaporizing and steaming the rice at the same time(I accidentally discovered this trick while cooking rice with rice cooker) ED: I throw stuff into a rice cooker and magic happens; TL: Sometime I throw vegetable when the rice already boiling, or made boiled egg ☐
 8. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irori> ☐
-

ED: Another cooking chapter. I really just want to move the plot along already. Anyway, Rio's life has started in some remote village. Only thing to look forward to in this arc seems to be his parents' background and more flag breaking.

TL : latest chapter[142] is about registering to become adventurer[SS], which almost made me explode

Translator: Cnine
Editor: tzmoh, Vrryou
Proofreader:

Chapter 32: Life in the Village Part 2

「Dora, Rio will start living in our village from today onwards, though you've probably already heard about it from your daughter. He's a lot stronger than he looks so use him as you see fit.」

After breakfast, Yuba led Rio to the village hunter.

「It's a pleasure to meet you. I am called Rio. I may be inexperienced but I look forward to working with you.」

Following Yuba's introduction, Rio briefly introduced himself.

「Ou! Nice to meet you too!」

The man called Dora answered with a wide smile.
His build was as large as a bear and he had a lively attitude to match.

「But, why me? Could it be...」

Having seemed to realise something, Dora sent Yuba a glance.

「Ahh, you, didn't you want someone to succeed you in hunting? I thought this child would be a good fit since he claims to have some experience. Though, may I dare say he's quite skilled?」

Yuba praised Rio's skills without a shred of doubt.
Perhaps his cooking earlier served as a testament to his skill.
Trusting Yuba's words as the village elder, Dora openly welcomed Rio.

「An experienced hunter huh? That can't be helped. But from what I've heard, Rio won't be living here permanently right?」

Dora said such a thing when he remembered Yuba's earlier words.

「That is so. That's why, while you're evaluating this child's hunting skills, you can think about when and who you want to train as your successor.」

「Really? That helps a lot.」

“What a great idea!” was what Dora’s expression conveyed as he spoke in a delighted voice.

「Well then, let’s hunt together today. I want to see how much you can do.」
「Understood.」

In the Seirei no Tami village, cattle, pigs, and chicken were already successfully domesticated using Mendel’s Law¹ as a basis. Although domestication was difficult due to the animals’ different dispositions and living environments, it resulted in much better tasting meat.

These creatures were the main targets for hunting and Rio had managed to learn hunting techniques when he tagged along hunting trips during his time with the Seirei no Tami.

On the other hand, domestication was already common among the human race.

However, besides the ones being raised in cities, livestock was kept for their use as farm labour, eggs, milk, and as assets for trading.

Therefore, aside from rare occasions such as festivals, food shortages during winter, or when an animal is injured or outlived its usefulness, livestock raised in the village were rarely put down for their meat.

As such, hunters filled the crucial role of providing the village with meat and it was a grave concern that a successor had not been selected yet.

「Looks like I can leave it to the two of you now, right? Now that there’s two of you, you can focus on finding a successor. If you spot somebody promising, take them under your wing before it’s too late.」

Yuba parted with those words after seeing Rio and Dora hitting it off well together on their first meeting.

「Got it. I was thinking about entrusting this position to my daughter’s fiance but, I wonder how long it’ll take until she gets married. Oh well, I’ll go see the elder about it when it’s decided.」

While nodding at his own words, Yuba was already quite some distance away heading home.

「Yosh, best regards from today onwards, Rio.」

Seeing that Yuba had left, Dora spoke with a refreshing smile.

「Certainly. Likewise, please treat me well, Dora-san.」

Rio returned the greeting while having a positive impression from Dora.

「Haha, I feel kinda awkward hearing you speak so formally. It'll be hard for me to grasp your words if we're caught in a pinch.」

Dora's words were tinged with embarrassment.

「Ah, that is so. Then, best regards, Dora. I'll try to speak more plainly during emergencies but please bear with me for now since it has already become something of a habit.」

Rio floated a wry smile while feeling a little abashed.

「Hou~ you're quite a strange guy, you know? But, I don't hate people like that.」

Dora laughed again while saying so.

Watching his response, Rio had a feeling that the two of them would get along well together.

Maybe his character had something to do with Yuba assigning Rio to help out with hunting.

「Then, shall we decide upon a few simple hand signals first?」

As they began to set out to hunt, Rio proposed such a thing.

「Hand signals? What the heck is that?」

Dora responded with a blank face.

「So as to not make noise, we decide on a set of hand signals beforehand for use as communication.」

Rio explained the reasoning behind hand signals to Dora.

「Hou. That seems pretty convenient. I see, let's try that. Do you have anything in mind?」

Rio taught the intrigued Dora a handful of simple hand signals he used during

his time at the Seirei no Tami village.

Expressing great interest in the hand signals, Dora quickly understood their importance.

「Yosh. Then let's go at once!」

After learning about the species of animals inhabiting the area and the rules for hunting in the area, the two began heading into the nearby forest. Their conversations gradually decreased as they headed deeper into the forest. Before long, there was barely any talking and communication was done using hand signals.

「Impressive.」

Looking at the arrow shot by Rio lodged in the Reno bird's body, Dora muttered in amazement.

He erased his presence and blended in naturally with his surroundings. He was highly observant and could quickly discover traces of game. He understood his target's characteristics and could predict the direction in which they would flee. When he spotted his target, it was guaranteed to be taken down by a single arrow.

Ten out of ten people who saw him would say that he was the ideal hunter. Rio drained the blood of all the game he caught to remove the smell from the meat.

He offered thanks to all the game he killed which reflected well with Dora.

Afterwards, so as to not disturb the ecosystem of the woods, they hunted in moderation in various areas.

The subsequent catch was a wild hare.

Discovering faint tracks indicating that a hare had passed, the two began to track it.

However, the tracks suddenly vanished.

The hare probably tried to conceal its tracks by unleashing a powerful jump to evade its pursuers.

Many animals performed such a maneuver to make their predator backtrack, but Rio had learned from experience that his prey was still in the vicinity.

Erasing his presence, he carefully searched his surroundings and discovered a single hare lying in wait.

Fortunately, it did not seem like the hare had noticed its pursuers yet.

Rio signalled Dora with his hand and circled around to the hare's side. He calmly readied his bow and aimed at its head.

If the arrow were to pierce the body, the meat would become spoiled from the bleeding.

As soon as Rio calmed his nerves and got his breathing in order, he released the arrow.

With a **Swish**, the arrow stealthily found its mark and struck the hare's head.

「Well done. Very impressive.」

After confirming that his arrow found its mark, Rio made his way towards the hare's body with Dora.

It still seemed to be alive and was weakly struggling to escape.

It could barely move before Rio swiftly ended its life.

After closing his eyes and offering a silent prayer, Rio began to drain the hare's blood.

A few minutes later, the hare was fully drained and washed.

「Good work. Then, onto our next game.」

Silently watching Rio process the hare, Dora gave a few words of praise after he finished.

Rio gave a small nod and placed the hare into the hunting bag on his waist.

After hunting a few more prey, the two decided to return to the village as it had already turned noon.

「Oh my, that was incredible. You're much better than me at this. I haven't gotten such a large catch in a long time.」

Nearing the village, Dora praised Rio with a hearty laugh. It was as if all the tension felt up until then had been a lie.

「Dora-san was also a great help in cornering them.」

Dora had also played a large part in their hunt by attracting their prey's attention and eventually cornering them.

Although the use of hand signals probably helped, the two made quite a good impromptu team.

「Hahaha, don't be so modest. You'd be a first rate hunter anywhere you go. I never even once, saw any signs of impatience from you. I was going to guide you to another hunting ground in the afternoon but that no longer seems necessary today.」

Dora suggested such a thing with a cheerful smile.

「Is that so? Then please use the time to find a successor, Dora-san.」
「Aah, thanks for that.」

Returning to the village, they hung their catch upside down and dismantled them.

When Rio first learned to hunt in the Seirei no Tami village, he remembered feeling resistant to the idea, but soon accepted it as a cruel necessity for survival.

Humans were a weak race that could not survive without sacrificing the lives of other species so somebody had to carry out these deeds for the good of many. Because that was what it meant to survive.

However, every time he drained a catch's blood, no matter how many times he did it, he could never shake off the discomfort of knowing that he was dismantling a creature that had passed away just mere moments ago. Exactly what did humans need to survive? Were they gathering more than they needed? Did their hunger know no bounds? Perhaps it was when they witnessed their deeds and felt neither remorse nor guilt that they had overstepped their boundaries.

Therefore, Rio gave thanks to all the animals he hunted.

Thank you for becoming my food.

After he finished dismantling the game, Rio returned home with a handful of meat as a gift.

He washed himself with soap to remove the smell of blood clinging to his body.

「Uwaa, Rio smells really nice!」

When he arrived in the living room, Ruri quickly reacted to the soap's fragrance from Rio's body.

「I used soap.」

When he said that, Rio showed Ruri a vial with viscous liquid inside.

「So— Soap!? This?」

Soap was considered a luxury among commoners and was rarely ever seen in a village such as this one.

As it stood, the human race of the time only knew how to create solid soap and commoners often used vinegar in place of soap.

Ruri expressed astonishment that such a high-class item was presented before her.

「Indeed. I did say that I could make medicine, so I can make soap too.」

Rio always carried around liquid soap to wash his hair and hands with. Although he had to be careful about when to use the soap since an odour would persist afterwards, Rio could not bear to disregard his personal hygiene.

「Fuee~ I don't think even Obaa-chan knows how to make soap, even though she's a doctor. Rio, you're amazing, aren't you?」

Respect reflected from Ruri's eyes as she looked at him.

「It's quite easy to make once you have the ingredients. Since I've been graciously allowed to stay here, Ruri-san can use as much as you like.」

「Eh!? M— Me? It's something reserved for nobles, is it really okay?」

Ruri spoke while slightly abashed because her hands were rough and splintered from the daily field work.

「No need to hold back. Sooner or later I'll introduce soap for the rest of the village as well.」

Rio had also intended on improving the village's overall hygiene. Every year, a large number of villagers got sick and at worst, a number of them passed away.

Rio judged the cause of this to be due to the lack adequate hygiene.

The lack of adequate sanitation was the root cause of all sorts of diseases.

A whole village could be wiped out if unlucky.

The spread of disease could be greatly reduced by having everybody practice habitual hand washing with soap and water.

「Eeh? Are you fine with giving out such a luxurious item to the villagers?」

「Well, it won't be a problem for just a village on this level.」

Although it would be troublesome to make soap for that many people, making enough for the village's population was manageable. It would be futile to only keep the village chief's house sanitary since bacteria could be still be spread by the other villagers. Still, if it was a city or town rather than a village, it would be impossible for him to distribute soap for free. On the other hand, it would be problematic if Yuba or Ruri became sick as a result of him being stingy.

「I— I see. Then, thanks...」

Ruri accepted the bottle from Rio and gingerly held it in her hands.

「It has a nice smell. It smells like fragrant olives² right?」

Ruri speculated about the smell's origin as she rubbed her hands as instructed creating bubbles.

「Yeah, that's right.」

Rio answered with a smile at Ruri who was rubbing and sniffing her hands.

「It smells really nice~」

Ruri washed her hands whilst humming happily.

A thought crossed Rio's mind about quickly identifying the herbs around the village so he could develop new soap for her.

1. ED2: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mendelian_inheritance#Mendel.27s_laws Biology

101; author feels the need to be all sciency ☐

2. TL : maybe the same golden osmanthus with the one from SAO since there's golden kanji in its name [金木犀] ED2: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Osmanthus_fragrans ☐

ED2: I must say I didn't enjoy this chapter at all. The hunt was uneventful and only served to highlight Rio's omnipotence. His skillset is approaching the point where you expect him to be able to achieve anything with ease. In addition, the author is taking this "value for life" aspect too far to the point where he's even hesitant to hunt for food and I'm fairly sure he wasn't a vegan in his past life. Fairly disappointed overall but at least Vol. 4's illustrations give something to look forward to.

Translator: Cnine
Editor: tzmoh, Vrryou
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Chapter 33: Life in the Village Part 3

Two weeks have passed since Rio arrived in the village. Although he had yet to converse with all the villagers, his presence was widely known to everybody. Yuba, the village chief, acted as his guardian and Ruri, her granddaughter, shared a cordial relationship with him.

Rio was assigned to the vital position of supplying meat to the village. Ever since his arrival, the village's supply of meat had increased substantially, even earning the praise of Dora.

Furthermore, his popularity among the young women soared¹.

As a result, even the more conservative villagers accepted Rio as a temporary resident.

Despite being assigned to help with hunting, it was not a daily activity. The ecosystem would collapse if hunting was carried out on a daily basis so they had to be cautious.

As such, Rio regularly took days off.

It was currently autumn, meaning the village was preparing for harvest season.

The village's total population exceeded 300.

However, the men in the village who were not the eldest sons of the families pursued work away from home, such as becoming soldiers.

Therefore, not many young men remained in the village, since many of them sought work elsewhere.

It became common for those who finished their work early and had a bit of time remaining to be roped into helping others.

As a result, during the days when Rio took a break from hunting, he would help out with farming work.

However, when he came to help and saw how their agriculture was managed, he recognized various areas that could be improved on.

Afterwards, Rio decided to discuss his ideas with Yuba.

「You know a way to increase the crop yield?」

Upon hearing Rio's proposal, Yuba gave a dubious response.

If there was a better method, somebody would have already tried it before and if successful, the idea would have spread.

As Rio's grandmother, she wanted to believe his words but as the village elder, she could not accept his words so easily.

It was understandable for Yuba to be skeptical.

「Indeed. Still, it's impossible to alter the method now when the crops are ready to be harvested. However, it will be possible to increase the crop yield starting with the next crop cycle.」

「Mhm...」

Yuba groaned while in deep thought.

Since Rio could easily understand her worries—

「Well, for now, how about I give you a brief rundown of the method?」

Rio spoke to Yuba in a carefree manner.

「Right, you could... Then, can you please explain to me what you would do to increase our yield?」

It seemed like she finally allowed herself to listen to his explanation.

「First is the soil. We can enhance the soil to allow better crop growth by adding a solution called fertilizer.」

Rio suggested improvements to the soil first.

「Fertilizer? Is that medicine for the soil? Fumu, well, it's like a good luck charm for a good harvest, right?」

That's right, every year in the village, a harvest festival was held to give thanks to the land and a blessing is performed.

Despite only scattering meaningless things over the land, at least they understood the act of vitalizing the soil.

Since that was the case, it would become easier to promote the use of fertilizer.

「And, is there a specific soil needed?」

Maybe it was because of her background as a doctor, Yuba displayed an interest in the subject.

「That's right, a special soil is required.」

Rio floated a thin smile at Yuba's attentive response.

「A special soil? What? What is it?」

「It's made by breaking down the leaves of deciduous and broadleaf trees into black coloured soil. The soil occurs naturally in the forest but can easily be created given enough leaves.」

That was the so-called fertilizer.

Fertilizer was widely used in modern agriculture.

Naturally occurring fertilizer usually had an unbalanced composition of nutrients. However, when compounded, one had control over the nutrient balance.

「Does something like that even exist? I've never seen something like that before.」

It seemed that even Yuba was not aware of its existence.

「Indeed, it does. Mixing it in with the soil will considerably improve the land's quality.」

「Is that so? Going by what you said, can we try it out right away?」

「Certainly. If you're still anxious, might I suggest we test it in the vegetable garden first?」

To ease her worries, Rio suggested to test it on the familiar vegetable garden.

「No, if we're to do it, I want to use a plot of the village's farmland next spring. We can easily gauge its effectiveness by comparing it to the other plots.」

An unexpectedly positive answer was given.

Rio floated a slight smile.

「Then, I'll prepare for the selection and transportation of the soil. 」

「Do you need help?」

「No, it's fine, since I'm the one who proposed the idea anyway. I can strengthen my body with Spirit Arts anyway so I'll have no problem moving large amounts

of soil.」

「Come to think of it, you did say that. All right then, I'll leave it to you.」

Yuba spoke with full confidence in Rio.

「Understood. With that out of the way, we can move onto the next topic. Like the soil, water is also an important factor.」

「Indeed, water is essential.」

Yuba answered in agreement.

Even without an explanation, the importance of water was naturally understood.

「Currently, there is a reservoir on the outskirts of the village, but with only this, depending on the weather conditions, won't the water in the reservoir be lost during a drought?」

Rio commented on the reservoir built on the outskirts of the village.

「Yes, but don't you know there's a river nearby? Ever since the establishment of the village, we would draw water from there whenever the water in the reservoir ran dry.」

Yuba gave an explanation to Rio's enquiry.

However, even if it solved the water shortage problem, it was a very inefficient use of labour.

「While you're not wrong to rely on the river for water, the problem lies in how you draw the water. Facilities for irrigation, called water wheels, are used in Strahl to draw water—」

Rio decided to give a brief explanation to Yuba about water wheels and how it was used to efficiently draw water.

Drawing water using a water wheel was a common technique used in the Strahl region.

If legends were to be believed, it was said that the knowledge was passed down from the Six Wise Gods to the human race.

If the water wheel performed as Rio explained, it could be used as an alternative or back-up to the reservoir.

「It seems quite convenient if possible, but even if you say you can draw water

from the river and drain it into the irrigation canal, how do you plan on drawing the water? And how much water can be distributed?」

Yuba was easily able to discern the advantage of the water wheel from Rio's simple explanation.

However, the problem lay in whether such a contraption could actually be realised.

「You see, to draw water using a water wheel—」

To address Yuba's concerns, Rio described the construction and mechanism of the water wheel.

「Amazing, can you really make something like that?」

Aside from the construction, if the water wheel performed as well as Rio had described it, it would greatly decrease the worry over water shortages for farming.

Yuba gazed at Rio in great admiration.

「Yes, using Spirit Arts, I can construct the irrigation canal and connect it to the reservoir within a month.」

The village was short on manpower to build an irrigation canal but that problem was solved with Rio's help.

There was no demerit in having him attempt it either.

「It's a very attractive proposal, provided that I've only heard the contents. But, is it fine to leave everything to you?」

Yuba spoke in an apologetic manner.

「It's alright, I aim to build the water wheel in the coming spring. With this much time on my hands, I won't have any problems with producing the fertilizer either. I've had a lot of free time lately anyway.」

Engineering was a field yet to be explored in Yagumo. If such a piece of technology, so ahead of its time, was introduced, there was a risk of attracting unnecessary attention from the surroundings. Still, eventually, somebody was bound to come up with the same idea. As a matter of fact, this idea was already implemented in Strahl and the Seirei

no Tami used both water wheels and windmills.

During years of poor harvest, many of the villagers were weakened from hunger. In addition to the frigid weather conditions, many became ill which in turn sometimes led to death.

In fact, Ruri's brother, who was two years younger than her, passed away at the age of four due to hunger and cold weather.

If a water wheel could help improve the situation, even by just a small margin, then Rio would not mind having the village attracting unwanted attention.

Those were his thoughts.

Despite having never met until now, Yuba and Ruri were his only relatives left in this world.

Rio could not just turn a blind eye to the obviously inefficient farming methods.

Furthermore, if the designs were stolen by an external party, it would be incredibly difficult for them to operate it without the Rio's guidance.

Even if the village attracted attention, it would not cause a serious problem if he allowed his knowledge to be distributed among the village's neighbours.

「Besides that, I can also improve the design of the farming tools, alter the sowing method, and cultivate the land more effectively.」

That was what Rio planned on doing for the village.

There were still many things that could be improved in regards to the village's agricultural practices.

Rio walked Yuba through each one of them one by one.

「Fumu, testing both the improved sowing method and soil at the same time seems like a good idea. Improving the farming tools at the same time shouldn't be too much work either since there aren't that many.」

After carefully deliberating over Rio's suggestions for a minute, Yuba muttered an affirmative response to his proposals.

However, slight resistance against the farming reform could be felt from her since the harvest would decrease in the short term.

Well, it was only natural to meet some resistance to a sudden proposal for an agricultural reform.

It is the result of suddenly changing one's lifestyle.

「Understood. I'll consult the village blacksmith about the farming tools then.」
「Mhm. I think I'll have you oversee the agricultural reform next spring.」
「Is that really all right?」

Rio was about to add "—for an outsider like myself?" but ended up shutting his mouth.

Despite only temporarily, Yuba had accepted him as a member of the village. It would be disrespectful to say something insensitive like that.

「Don't worry about that. Instead, try to achieve some results by all means, okay?」

Yuba showed him a gentle smile as she spoke.

「Of course.」

Rio straightened up and gave a strong bow.

Having received permission, Rio quickly put his plan into action.

He headed into the forest, which served as the village's hunting grounds, and dug up some suitable soil containing compost. Gathering the collected compost, he returned to the plot of land entrusted to him.

Since the soil's acidity levels in the area were similar to those back in Japan, Rio decided to sprinkle some ashes of burnt plants into the soil mix.

Even though mixing in human and animal excretion would greatly improve the soil's quality, the psychological resistance would likely be too great.

While rice plants could be grown in the region, it was difficult to cultivate.

Fortunately, rice bran could be used as a substitute.

By planting the rice-bran just before the winter, fermentation should be completed by the time spring arrived resulting in fertile soil.

Although it would take time for results to become evident, such was agriculture.

Rio did not know how long he would stay in the village, but at least, he would stay until his agricultural improvements yielded visible results.

If that was the case, it would probably be until around next autumn.

Furthermore, Yuba's words in regards to his parents also weighed on Rio's mind.

He was finally able to visit his parents' graves but his worries only grew.

It was the main reason why he chose to stay in the village for a while.

As a result, Rio prioritized familiarizing himself with the village. Despite obtaining Yuba's permission to stay, he might be driven out by the other villagers if he could not clear his suspicion with the rest of the village. In order to not face harsh resistance in such an isolated community, he had to make compromises. Rio had lived in rural areas in his previous life and understood as much. Fortunately, he felt that the majority of the village treated him amiably during the last two weeks.

On one such day, Rio strolled around the village in search for those needing help with repairing their tools or houses. Even though there were a handful of craftsmen in the village, they were lacking in manpower and could not afford to help with everyone's problems. As such, many were deeply thankful for Rio's assistance on what would usually have taken much longer.

「Thank you very much! You saved us. When my husband said to leave it to him, I became terribly worried.」

A woman with well-rounded proportions spoke to Rio with a cheerful laugh. Her name was Ume. She was referred to as the village's hero and held a highly regarded position in the village.

「It's nothing, I'm just glad to be of use. Don't be afraid of calling me if you need help again.」

Just a few minutes before, Rio had repaired the walls of her house and made sure no cracks were left for drafts to enter.

「You really saved us, you know. When I heard an outsider had arrived at Yuba-sama's house, I was worried what kind of man he was. However, a handsome gentleman like you is always welcome.」

Ume thanked Rio while floating a refreshing smile on her face. Afterwards, he passed by several houses, greeting their residents and offering to repair any damages. At first, many sent him dubious looks.

However, when Ruri came along testifying his repair skills, many allowed him to repair minor tools as a test.

Upon seeing his remarkable handiwork, they were full of admiration and continued asking for repairs for various other things.

It could be said that the results were extremely agreeable.

「Geez, Rio is really versatile. You can cook, hunt, you're knowledgeable about agriculture, and you have dexterous fingers. You can compound medicine too, right? Aren't you the single most sought person in the village?」

On their way back from work, Ruri said such a thing with a bright smile as the two of them made their way back to the village chief's house.

「I'm just a jack-of-all-trades. I'm no match for a master of a single art.」

Rio answered her with a wry smile.

「Nnh, I don't think that's true at all. For somebody who can do everything, the village is extremely grateful.」

Turning her face slightly, Ruri stole a glance at Rio's face.

「Even if it's just a bit, I'm glad I'm of use.」

He could tell from her words that those were her true feelings. It was similar to placing absolute trust in an obedient younger brother. With a tinge of embarrassment, Rio thanked her.

「Oi.」

Suddenly, a voice that could hardly be called favourable was heard from behind.

The two of them turned around.

There, stood a boy slightly older than Rio.

He was around 16 or 17 years old.

「Ruri and the elder might have accepted you, but I will never recognize you!」

As soon as they faced him, the boy spat out those words with open hostility.

「Uhm...」

Rio was at a loss for words as he gazed at the young man who was not even

trying to hide his antagonism.

「Shin, what are you spouting all of a sudden? You're being rude towards Rio.」

When Rio was at a loss over how to respond, Ruri took a step forward and said those words in Rio's defence.

Rio already had some guesses as to why the boy was so hostile towards him. Perhaps he thought that an outsider like Rio would disturb the peaceful life the village had led up until now.

He wanted to protect that peace.

Perhaps he took action with these thoughts in mind.

Such people commonly appeared in isolated communities.

In a sense, his worries were justified.

Despite only being a small village, it was an important home for them.

For that reason, Rio was troubled over how to respond to him.

「Tch, Ruri has nothing to do with this! That person is an outsider!」

The youth by the name of Shin became enraged and brushed off Ruri's reprimand.

「So what if he's an outsider? Obaa-chan already gave him a permission to stay in the village. Besides, he's also helping out around the village, you know?」

With a look of disgust, Ruri glared at Shin.

「Heh— Hah! All the girls in the village are falling head over heels for such a frail weakling.」

However, Shin spoke without even hiding his disgust towards Rio. A scornful scowl was directed at Rio.

「Ara, Rio isn't weak, you know. I've seen how muscular he is.」

「Wha— you, and that bastard...」

Hearing Ruri's easily misinterpretable words, Shin's face became beet red as he fumbled over his words.

(I guess in a sense, I'm disturbing his peace...)

Judging from his reaction, Rio could see why Shin was so hostile towards him.

「Also, since you were chosen as Dora's apprentice, why don't you ask Rio for some advice? You should know that he's quite skilled at hunting.」

Even though Ruri was trying to defend Rio, her words were fanning the flames instead.

「Ha— Hah! Wh— Who the hell's gonna ask that bastard for advice!? Just watch, I'll become a far better hunter than him in no time!」

As expected, Shin seemed to hold a strong sense of rivalry against Rio.

「Haha...」

Receiving such blatant hostility, Rio let out a dry laugh.

Disproving of Rio's reaction, Shin clicked his tongue and quickly left.

「Geez, he's such a child despite being older than me. Sorry about that, Rio.」

「Ah, don't worry about it. When an outsider like myself intrudes on your territory, it's only natural for you to desperately want to defend it.」

Gazing at Shin's retreating figure, Rio let those words flow from his mouth. It was the gaze of a troubled parent watching their child throwing a selfish tantrum.

「Yeah. ...Thanks, you know?」

Glad that Rio did not become offended, Ruri thanked him with a thin smile. After all, Shin was still a member of the village. Afterwards, they made haste home and ate dinner.

In the dead of night, lit solely by the moonlight, Rio vigorously trained with the sword he received from Dominique.

The effects of being tardy for only a single day would still be evident three days later.

That was why ever since he came to this world — during his travels and even after settling in this village — he would do his best to not miss a single day of training.

One could say it had already become a habit for him.

Continuing to repeatedly swing his sword, he made sure to ingrain the movements into his body in order to never become dull.

Whenever Rio swung his sword, the sharp and distinct whirring sound of a

blade sailing through the cool air resounded, like a chorus of crickets crying in the night.

The cool breeze carrying the night fog brought a pleasant sensation to his skin. The trees lightly shook from the slight breath of cold air.

After finishing his sword practice, Rio moved on to polishing his martial arts skills.

He focused on his training for several dozen minutes without even taking a break before noticing that Ruri had been silently watching him.

「It's not really interesting to watch you know?」

He called out to Ruri with a wry smile.

「Ahaha, you noticed?」

Ruri reacted to his words with a hint of embarrassment.

「Thank you for your hard work. I was fascinated by your movements, so I unintentionally ended up watching. It kind of resembles a dance of sorts.」

「It's nothing like that, you know. It is an art for murder after all.」

Rio smiled wryly at Ruri's words of admiration.

「Uhm, that, could it be that Rio has killed someone before?」

Ruri timidly asked him such a thing in a strained voice.

「...No, not yet, at least.」

Rio answered her in a firm voice.

「I see...」

Ruri spoke in a relieved tone upon hearing Rio's answer.

A person's life was cheap in this world.

Many died from illness.

Many were killed in wartime.

And much more were murdered by bandits.

As a result, for someone bearing arms such as Rio, it would not be surprising if he was attacked and killed his assailant in self-defence.

However, Ruri was relieved to know that his beautiful, dance-like movements were not developed for murder.

「Why did Rio learn martial arts?」

Out of the blue, such a question leaked out of Ruri's mouth.

Rio's martial arts carried an awe-inspiring magnificence.

Even from the eyes of an amateur, she was able to tell that he could not have arrived at that point solely through talent and superficial effort; his motives weighed on her mind.

「Haha, back when I was small, it was for a very simple reason.」

Rio answered her enquiry with a wry smile.

「When you were small?」

Ruri questioned him further with evident curiosity.

「There is this girl I love, I wanted the power to protect her.」

He awkwardly told Ruri his original motivation.

「Hee~ so Rio has a person he loves?」

Ruri asked in a tone full of interest.

「Yes, there is.」

From those words alone, she could understand his sentiment.

Ruri looked at Rio, admiring how he could openly declare his feelings without hesitation.

「I think that is a wonderful reason. Does she still reside in Rio's hometown?」

「Yeah, probably. We were separated when we were young and are probably strangers by now. I don't even know if we can meet again, even if I returned...」

Ruri thought Rio looked somewhat lonely when he spoke those words. However, she was hesitant to pursue the subject any further.

「You may not be able to meet her, yet you continue to train?」

「...I'm just afraid of losing something I dedicated so many years into.」

Rio spoke with a distant look on his face.

It was the connection to his childhood sweetheart that he was really afraid of losing.

It was for her that Rio started martial arts.

Although he was the one who arbitrarily started it in high spirits, he was afraid that his only remaining connection with her might really be broken if he stopped.

「Then, surely the two of you can meet again one day! As long as Rio continues to believe, nothing is impossible.」

Feeling his uneasiness, Ruri spoke a few words of encouragement.

「You're... right.」

Rio lightly laughed at Ruri's sincerity.

「You'll get cold just standing there. You should come back quickly.」

The late night breeze was already cold despite fall having not arrived yet. It would not be smart to stay outside without exercising.

「Okay. I'll go sleep soon since I have to get up early tomorrow anyway.」

Rio nodded at Ruri's words.

Feeling the autumn chill, Rio wrapped his arms around his body.

「Okay, good night.」

「Good night. Rio shouldn't stay up late since it's bad for you, you know.」

As he saw off Ruri, Rio unconsciously looked up at the night sky. At that very moment, by a stroke of pure luck, he saw a shooting star. Mesmerized by its beauty, Rio stood there watching the night sky for a while longer.

1. TL: You're not intentionally building a harem right? ☐

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Chapter 34: An Unwelcome Visitor

Autumn arrived.

And so had the harvest season.

The women gathered the rice plants and wheat while the men followed with hoes, swinging at the now naked ground.

Among them, the figure of Rio could be seen.

The fields were plowed to remove the roots of the rice plants left behind after harvesting.

In truth, Rio could plow the fields in an instant using Spirit Arts.

However, such a shoddy method could only be done if Rio was present and it would be imprudent to deprive the villagers of their jobs.

Before he realised it, countless blisters had formed and burst on his hands.

Even so, Rio wholeheartedly kept plowing the field.

It was monotonous work, but it reminded him of the time he helped a farmer's family in his previous life. Recalling those times made him happy in a way.

Among the agricultural reforms proposed by Rio, the remodelled farm tools were already showing results.

Some villagers were using hoes modified by Rio and marvelled at their ease of use.

The soil improvements and seeding were done on a separate, unused field so it would not be until next year for results to show.

There was still a lot of time until then, as well as a lot of preparations to be made.

「Ooi~ It's almost time for a break!」

When work had progressed to an extent and the end was in sight, Ruri declared a rest period in a loud voice.

「Okay! It's lunch time now. One per person, okay? Make sure to thank Rio for the salt added into today's meal!」

Usually, there were no lunch breaks, but today, despite being limited to only one per person, salted rice balls were served.

A few of the women including Ruri gathered in the village chief's housing to prepare the rice balls using the salt brought by Rio and the village's supply of rice.

「Rio! Thanks!」

The married men of the village received the rice balls in high-spirits and loudly thanked Rio.

「Don't worry about it.」

Rio responded to their exclamations of gratitude with a smile.

「Wait! You guys thank Rio too!」

With sullen expressions, the single men accepted the rice balls in silence and were harshly scolded by Ruri.

They ignored Ruri's words, pretending to not have heard her, and proceeded to stuff the rice balls into their mouths.

Their eyes widened in surprise at the increased salt content.

However, when they remembered that the salt was provided by Rio, complicated feelings arose within them.

「Geez, aren't they behaving just like kids? What's with them?」

Ruri said such a thing when Rio came to receive a rice ball after confirming every villager had already received their share.

「No, well it's only natural for them to resent me since I can still be considered an outsider anyway.」

With a wry smile, Rio made a remark in their defence.

「That can't be true. Everyone in the village has already accepted you. They're just sulking because they're still children. Hey, let's eat together. Everybody's calling for us.」

With that said, Ruri pulled Rio by the hand over to where the married men and women were gathered.

In the midst of all the noisy chatter, the group of young, single girls who were impatiently waiting for Rio's arrival called out to him in fiery voices and invited him to sit with them.

「You guys haven't eaten yet?」

Surprised that none of the girls had touched their rice balls yet, Rio inquired them about it.

「Nope! It's more delicious to eat together with everyone!」

A young girl exclaimed as such with sparkling eyes.

「That is... sorry, it seems I've kept you waiting then.」

Rio slightly lowered his head in apology.

「Eh~ Sayo said she preferred eating with Rio-sama over us~」

「Th— That's not it! Ah, no! It's not like I don't want to eat together with Rio-sama and everybody else!」

The other girls started teasing Sayo.

As a result, Sayo became flustered and her face became beet red.

Her appearance reminded him of an adorable little animal, kind of like Latifa.

[ED: ๖_๖]

The others heartwarmingly watched her flustered state.

Without a doubt, she was cherished by everyone.

「Well, in truth, I also waited since I wanted to eat with Rio-sama.」

The girl who just teased Sayo spoke up.

「Haha, I really appreciate your thoughts but, next time please don't wait for me.」

Rio answered with a refreshing smile, though a hint of irony could be felt.

「E~eh... But, Rio-sama gives off the feeling of a noble.」

「Yeah, how do you say it? It's like he possesses a completely different aura than those other men in the village, right? Look, even now they're glaring at us.」

「Uwah~ What's with them? So creepy.」

「Like you know, don't you think those guys are the same?」

「To even compare them to Rio-sama would be an insult for him.」

「Ahaha, you're so right~」

As the sole male among the chattering girls, Rio felt uncomfortable in this situation.

He could feel the glares of the young men from afar boring into his back. They could not stomach the fact that all the young women of the village were fawning over Rio.

「Ah, come to think of it, it seems like the farm tools conceived by Rio are really popular!」

「Yah, my dad's absolutely ecstatic about it.」

Working together with the village blacksmiths, the farm tools conceived by Rio were already in use by a few villagers and garnering an endless stream of praises.

It was decided that only tools that broke would be replaced with the new variants.

「Rio-sama's soap is even better than that!」

「Just a whiff of that scent makes you feel like a princess, right?」

The soap Rio compounded and distributed to every household was also positively received.

To improve the village's overall level of sanitation, everybody was encouraged to use soap without reserve when working outside.

The quality of life in the village was steadily improving thanks to Rio's accomplishments.

Other than a handful of young men, the village also exhibited an extremely welcoming atmosphere for Rio.

Even though he felt slightly discouraged by the boys' blatant hostility and the girls' overbearing affection, Rio was sure that his relationships with them would continue to improve.

「Rio?」

As Rio was lost in thought over such matters, Ruri, who was sitting beside him, called out to him.

「What's wrong? You look like you're in a daze.」

Ruri glanced at Rio's face with a slightly worried expression.

「Yeah, I just had a bit on my mind. Sorry.」

He slightly lowered his head with a wry smile.

It was one of his bad habits where he would become totally immersed in his own thoughts.

Ruri was the only girl in the village who treated him normally without honorifics.

Maybe it was because they were cousins, even if she did not know that herself. She was his precious conversation partner because she did not give him special treatment.

「And, did you know that by wagon, the capital is only about a day's travel from here? Once the harvest is over, we sell whatever surplus we gathered after taxes in the capital.」

「Hee, that's quite interesting.」

Rio expressed interest when Ruri began speaking about the capital.

「Really? I overheard Dora-san talking to Obaa-chan about it, but is Rio willing to come along as a guard?」

「I don't really mind.」

「Then I'll let Obaa-chan know right away.」

Ruri took off running to where Yuba was with a delighted smile. As he watched Ruri's back retreat into the distance, Rio stood up and resumed his work.

「Alright then, let's continue doing our best everyone.」

「Okayyy~」

The girls gave a halfhearted response to his departing words. Afterwards, Rio devoted himself to his work without taking any breaks. Thanks to his efforts, he was able to finish work earlier than usual. Ruri was still hard at work producing the village's specialty products so her return would be some time later.

Returning home early, Rio found that he had a bit of free time on his hands and decided to prepare dinner.

Yuba was also home, receiving and organizing reports from the villagers. Not wanting to disturb them, he prepared some tea and gave a brief greeting before making preparations for dinner.

An irresistible scent began drifting out from the kitchen a short time later.

「It smells great as always. You never cease to amaze me.」

Yuba appeared in the kitchen after having finished her discussion with the villagers.

「No, it's just that I had a bit of free time on my hands.」

Recently, Ruri had started coming home from work late. On the other hand, Yuba was frequently needed by the villagers. As a result, Rio took over dinner preparations in their absence. He did not find it much of a hassle to prepare dinner for the three of them at all. In the midst of his preparations, loud voices were suddenly heard coming from nearby.

Rio and Yuba exchanged a glance.

「A quarrel?」

Yuba muttered in a dubious voice. The voices were clearly angry. Although arguments between villagers were not unheard of, they rarely ever happened. Therefore, it was not unreasonable for Yuba to be somewhat perplexed.

「I'll go see what's going on.」
「I'll come too.」

Saying that, the two immediately headed outside through the front door. A small distance away, they found two groups of men glaring angrily at one another. On one side were the young men from the village, while the other side consisted of another group of young men whom Rio was unfamiliar with. Despite the village men outnumbering the opposing group, there was a rather conspicuously bulky man among the foreigners. If it came to an all out brawl, that man would surely play a significant role. And lastly, a lone girl stood in the rear being protected by the village men. It was Ruri.

What on earth was going on there?
For the time being, Rio decided to approach them.

「You bastard, what do you mean you want to stay in the village chief's house? Huh!?!」

And there stood Shin, shouting and threatening the rather good-looking and well-built man.

「Hah, not only am I a guest, I'm also the son of the neighbouring village chief. It's only natural for me to stay at the village chief's house.」

The man threatened by Shin countered him with a fearless smile.

「Haah!?! In that case, there's the guest house! And you want to stay for two damned days!?! Know your place asshole.」

It seemed that in confronting them, Shin had lost his temper.

「It can't be helped, you know. Our cart broke down nearby and it'll be impossible to repair by the end of today since it's already nightfall.

The man addressed Shin in a condescending tone.

「So, we'll repair it tomorrow and depart the day after that. I mean, in total, it's not even two full days. Doesn't that seem reasonable to you? Or are you an idiot?」

The man shrugged while directing a pitying gaze towards Shin.

「Che. Your attitude doesn't reflect your appearance whatsoever. All the more reason for a scum like you to stay in the guest house. A worthless bastard like you doesn't deserve to even step foot in the village chief's house.」

「Haah!?! Are you trying to act smart with me, you lil' wimp?」

「Ha! A piece of shit like you is just after Ruri's body!」

The other men from the village were nodding at Shin's words. Seeing their reaction, the man floated a wide grin.

「Aah, I see now. Such an idiot. You're not even her lover yet you want to monopolize her? Damned morons, all of you.」

The man mockingly taunted them.

「...the hell did you just say!?!」

Like oil being poured onto a fire, the anger of the village men exploded.

「At any rate, thanks to the great me¹ being the second son of the neighbouring village chief, perhaps I should take Ruri as my bride to relieve succession problem of the heirless village chief and become the next village chief. Hence it's only natural for us to deepen our relationships from here on out.」

In the dangerously volatile atmosphere, the man offered even more provoking words.

「Don't fuck with me!」

The men of the village seemed like they were about to let loose at any moment.

The situation was at its breaking point.

Two people approached the situation and were met with an explosive atmosphere.

Rio glanced at Yuba walking beside him and saw a disgusted expression.

「Silence! Gon, what do you think you're doing? If you're trying to pick a fight here then leave this instant!」

Right when the outbreak of an all-out brawl was about to ensue, Yuba called out to everybody gathered in a thundering voice.

「Che...」

The large man, Gon, clicked his tongue.

The village men also averted their eyes from Yuba with displeased faces.

Standing next to Yuba, Rio surveyed all the men.

(That man, could it be... that he was trying to pick a fight from the start?)

Rio observed Gon with cold eyes.

His speech and behaviour all pointed towards starting a fight.

If that was just his usual attitude, then he was a simple fool.

However, if it was deliberate, then the issue lay in his motives. Either way, his character was quite an unpleasant one.

「So, if you came to pick a fight, the exit's right over there.」

In a tone that left no room for discussion, Yuba pointed towards the entrance

of the village.

「Che, won't you listen to our situation first? We were in the middle of transporting our harvest surplus to trade and sell but our cart broke down midway, so we sought refuge in this village.」

Gon explained the reason why he stopped by the village.

「I see. There's only one hut I can spare for you since peddlers also stop by around this time. Choose one to your liking.」

「Oi oi, are you telling me to sleep, huddled together with everybody in that tiny cabin?」

Despite already having caused so much trouble, he still knew no shame. Rio stared at him in disgust.

「It's only natural. I will not allow you to stay in my house after causing such a disturbance. Obediently accept your punishment. Now get moving.」

Yuba spoke in a stern voice that left no room for argument.

「Che, okay, I get it. I'm going!」

Gon answered in an utterly foul mood.

He passed by Shin, roughly brushing him aside.

When his body was hit, Shin twisted his face in irritation.

「Ha! Serves you right. And while you're at it, do me a favour and lock yourself up in there.」

However, a provoking smile immediately formed as Shin spat out an insult.

「Huh? Wimp's trying to get all smart with me again?」

At that moment, Gon lost his patience and his hand flew towards Shin's neck. He grabbed Shin's neck and lifted him off the ground using only one arm.

「Gah...」

Shin grabbed onto Gon's arms while squirming in pain.

Despite struggling to break free with all his strength, Gon's thick arm did not budge.

A look of delight spread over Gon's face as he watched Shin writhe in pain.

「Shin!」

Ruri cried out in panic as she quickly made her way towards them. Seeing that the situation would take a turn for the worst if it were to continue, Rio decided to step in and help Shin.

「Stop this at once! Or I will really have you leave!」

Fortunately, Yuba stepped in, strongly reprimanding Gon before either Rio or Ruri could arrive.

Gon reluctantly released his grasp on Shin's neck.

「Oi oi. This guy provoked this village's guest, me, the second son of the neighbouring village chief no less.」

Having said that, Gon glanced down at Shin, who lay collapsed on the ground and rubbing his neck in pain.

「You're the one who started this whole mess. There won't be a third time, understood?」

Yuba gave her final warning in a tone devoid of any emotion.

「Hah... Okay, I get it. I'll leave this worthless village as soon as possible.」

Perhaps because he was able to vent some of his frustration out on Shin, he immediately departed after leaving a few ridiculing words.

「Shin! Are you alright?」

After Gon left, Ruri rushed up to treat Shin.

「Yeah, I'm okay. Sorry.」

Shin apologized in vexation.

「It's not Shin who needs to apologize! Sheesh...」

Ruri offered a hand to help him off the ground.

While refusing her help, Shin stood up with a somewhat relieved look.

When he met eyes with Rio by chance, a triumphant smile formed on his face. Seeing that, Rio could only smile wryly in amazement.

Afterwards, Gon's companions obediently made their way towards the guest house to rest without raising another ruckus.

By the time they returned home for dinner, Rio and the others had already forgotten about Gon.

「Haa~ today's meal is also delicious~」

Ruri's eyes sparkled at the meal prepared by Rio. His dishes had a high compatibility with rice as proof of Ruri's chopsticks moving faster than usual.

Seeing her blissful expression, he felt his dinner preparations were well worth the effort.

It was a noisy day with uninvited guests dropping by, but the usual peace returned when dinner was served.

At around the same time, in the cabin lent out to Gon and his companions, the rowdy lot of men were exchanging liquor.

There was a lack of drinking snacks but empty plates were strewn around the table.

「That Ruri girl's really grown up to become quite something, right Aniki?」

A short man standing beside Gon spoke while pouring him some more liquor.

「Yeah, though she's still just a stubborn little girl, ain't she? I'll make her yield to me.」

Grinning from ear to ear, Gon emptied his cup in one gulp. Ever since he was young, Gon was short-tempered, violent, and was treated as a problem child in his village.

He recklessly abused his authority and coerced others into submission through brute strength, earning him the fear and annoyance of the villagers.

In truth, while his older brother was expected to succeed as the next village chief, Gon only wished to be slightly more acknowledged.

However, his elder brother was hesitant to openly criticize Gon which eventually led to Gon being ostracized because he was unable to handle him any longer. Before long, Gon grew up to become a deeply selfish and scheming individual.

Gon was already 16 years old.

He was well past the point where his personality could be changed any longer, willingly or unwillingly.

Accordingly, second sons and lower in Gon's village began to gather around him like suckerfish², forming a group of problem children.

The group became increasingly boisterous in the following years to the point where even the village chief found it difficult to deal with them.

Even his current task, to trade the excess harvest in the capital, was not originally given to Gon and his companions.

But then, backed up by his large ego, as usual, he forced his way into the trade union.

Of course, Gon and his group of misfits did not make for pleasant travel companions so a different man from the trade group had to be sent.

Nevertheless, even if it was only for a short while, having Gon and his group away from the village relieved a lot of the villagers' stress.

Therefore, when it came time to trade their harvest surplus, the village chief would send Gon to the capital.

During that time, Gon became acquainted with Ruri and set his sights on her.

Although Gon could not succeed his village in becoming the next village chief since he was the second son, he saw that Ruri's village did not have a successor and openly declared himself as the next village chief.

In contrast to his desires, the village chief recommended him to join the national army, not even bothering to hide his wish to see Gon gone.

It was definitely not something Gon would accept.

He would live the way he wanted to.

The key to his ambitions was Ruri.

And as icing on the cake, Ruri's body matched his desires.

She exuded a motherly aura.

When he was small, he was brought over to this village by the village chief and met her for the first time. It was love at first sight.

In the beginning, he treated her kindly, but he was already disliked by her due to his past faults.

Still, something so trivial like that did not phase him.

He would make her submit by force.

「O— Oi, we can't cause any trouble, you know.」

No longer being able to ignore the problem, the man in charge of public

relations and leader of the group, appealed for Gon to not cause needless trouble.

「Ah?」

Drunk on alcohol, Gon shot him a threatening look.

「Hii— Ah, no, I mean, please don't create too much trouble if you can.」

Being glared at by eyes like that of a predator, the man could only give a pathetic warning.

「Hah, it's not like we're going to do anything bad. I mean, isn't it convenient for the village when I leave? You should just focus on doing business in the capital.」

「Ah... I— It's not like that.」

The man fumbled for words after realising Gon had seen through him. However, that man was no longer a concern in Gon's mind. All he thought about was Ruri.

「Still, that old hag Yuba sure came at a bad time.」

One of the suckerfish spoke in disappointment.

「Sigh... That old hag came just when I was about to beat the living shit out of that Shin.」

Gon snorted and emptied the remaining alcohol in his cup.

「I could be staying in the village chief's house right now and having Ruri serve me sake.」

Gon had originally planned to fake the cart breaking down and trick them into letting him stay in the village chief's house.

At that time, he intended on accepting Shin's punch without making a fuss. He knew he was disliked by Ruri and the rest of the guys in the village. That is why he tried to provoke a fight.

「Well, I'm only going to sneak in. It won't take too long.」

Although a small amount of immaturity could still be sensed from when Gon saw her last year, Ruri had grown considerably, developing an attractive

feminine body.
And now, she was ripe for the picking.
He would reach for her and completely expose her immodest figure.
Even if she resisted, he could just threaten her into submission.

Since the implicit law of “Yobai³ culture” was an accepted practice among the villagers, Ruri could do nothing but accept him as her marriage partner if he forced himself onto her.
However, Yobai culture required consent from both parties.
It was a point which Gon had overlooked.

How to enjoy her?
Hopefully, she would be careless tonight and would obediently accept his advances.
A part of his cart was damaged for this rare chance after all.
The plan was going to be carried out tomorrow night, after all the villagers were asleep.
Gon immersed himself in fantasies of breaking the stouthearted Ruri and making her cry.

1. ED: He refers to himself as “Ore-sama” ☐
2. TL : suckerfish, the little fish that was always following along a shark to feed on the remnant meat of shark prey ☐
3. ED: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yobai> ☐

TL : no comment for this cliffhanger
ED: Big bad wolf is here. Oh do I ever wonder what’s going to happen, I can’t possibly imagine how it’ll end /s
PF2: sigh it’s gonna be SAO all over again

Translator: Cnine
Editor: Vrryou
Proofreader: SenjiQ, Jake1456

Chapter 35: Another Visitor

The next day, although it was just like any other day, the village was bustling with activity.

Harvest season had arrived making autumn the busiest season of the year.

Rice, wheat, grains, vegetables, fruits, and crops all needed to be harvested and preserved before winter arrives.

Afterwards, the harvest had to be sorted to account for taxes and arrangements needed to be made for the surplus to be transported to the capital.

In addition, preparations were required for the harvest festival to pray for a favourable harvest next year.

Furthermore, peddlers dropped by the village more often during autumn.

To survive the winter, the villagers had to stock up on supplies since farming was out of the question and venturing outdoors was incredibly risky.

As one would expect, salt was in high demand thanks to its many uses in preserving food, such as drying and fermenting.

It was the most prosperous time of year for peddlers and in turn, the busiest for the village.

Usually, Rio would go hunting today but priorities required him to help out with the harvest in the morning.

On the other hand, Gon's party, which arrived the day before, was quietly repairing their cart.

It was almost like yesterday's scuffle was nothing but a lie.

It was just past noon and Rio was taking a break from his work at home with Yuba when they heard a knock on the door.

「I'll get the door.」

「Please.」

Allowing Yuba to remain seated, Rio quickly stood up and made his way towards the door.

「Ah, Ume-san. What's the matter?」

Ume, who acted as the mediator of the group of girls in the village, was

standing at the door looking slightly flustered.

「Rio, please inform Yuba-sama that the tax collector, Hayate-sama, has arrived.」

Ume informed him of the situation with a heartwarming smile.

「Fumu, I heard you. Well then, shall we go greet him at once?」

Having overheard their conversation, Yuba stood up and made her way outside.

「Ah, Rio. Can I trouble you to prepare another five portions for tonight's dinner? A few guests will be joining us for dinner tonight.」

Yuba paused and made a request of Rio before passing through the door.

「Understood. If that's the case, shall I prepare a slightly more extravagant meal? I will be heading out to hunt some more game this afternoon then.」

Yuba floated a joyous smile at Rio's proposal.

「Alright, I'll see you later then.」

「Okay, we'll be back home for dinner at the usual time. Thanks for your hard work.」

「Understood.」

Confirming what needed to be done for the evening, Rio saw Yuba off. Finishing up his remaining tea and putting the tea set away, he resumed his work.

Since he had already finished his part of helping with the ongoing harvest, Rio decided to head out to hunt for the afternoon.

Making trips to several hunting grounds near the village, he managed a bit more game than usual.

Having achieved favourable results, Rio elected to return early to dismantle his catch.

When Rio returned home, he discovered that neither Yuba nor Ruri had returned yet.

After carefully washing away the smell of sweat and blood, Rio started preparations for dinner.

Following Yuba's instructions, he prepared dinner for eight people. Having not made dinner for so many people in a long while, his arms began to ache.

The Renou¹ bird he just caught was going to be served as the main dish. After that would be the rice, miso soup, and pickles. Reciting the menu in his mind, Rio began to cook. A short while later, a mouth-watering aroma drifted out from the kitchen. At that time, Yuba returned home along with several men.

「Welcome back.」

Rio greeted the guests with his best professional smile.

「Mhm, I'm back. It smells really good, doesn't it?」

Reacting to the room filled with the fragrance of cooking food, Yuba returned his greeting with a beaming smile. Even the other men's appetites seemed to be affected by the smell as their expressions were brimming with anticipation.

「It really smells wonderful, Yuba-dono.」

Seeming to have his appetite affected by the smell, a well-dressed young man commented from behind Yuba.

「Hou, it seems there's an unfamiliar boy here but...」

Following from his previous comment, the young man's eyes sparkled with interest when he spotted Rio.

「That child's name is Rio. He's currently staying in the village for the time being.」

Yuba gave a simple introduction for Rio. At her words, Rio ceased cooking at once and exited the kitchen.

「It's a pleasure to meet you. Allow me to introduce myself, I am Rio. Pleased to make your acquaintance.」

Greeting the men, he performed a deep and polite bow.

「Mhm, I see. My name is Saga Hayate. I am the tax collector assigned to this

village. My best regards.」

The young man introduced himself with a dignified look. In Yagumo, it was customary to provide one's surname before their given name. In this case, Saga was the young man's family name and Hayate was his given name.

His clothes resembled a monk's garbs, with an exquisitely designed haori² draped over his shoulders. Two straight swords hung from his waist. He appeared to be a few years Rio's elder.

「Likewise, best regards, Saga-dono.」

Hayate gave a light bow. As he raised his head, Rio could tell solely from his face that he was no ordinary person. Judging from his conduct, the two straight swords hanging from his waist were not just for show either.

「Of course.」

Hayate too, determined Rio to be capable, seeing how he carried himself and his steady center of gravity. Hayate carried an expression of admiration at Rio's show of courtesy.

「Now then, although it's a bit early, shall we have dinner? Rio, can you please go call Ruri back?」

「There's no need since isn't she coming soon anyway?」

The sun had already begun to set. Soon, evening would descend on the village. It was already time for work to be wrapped up and for everyone to head home.

「I'm home~!」

Just as they were talking about her, Ruri returned home with a cheerful greeting.

「I— Is this not Ruri-dono?」

Hayate suddenly lost all the composure he had shown up until then.

「Ah, Hayate-sama. It's been awhile.」

Breaking out into an amiable smile, Ruri greeted the startled Hayate.

「Ye— Yeah, it's been a while. You're still lively as always.」

「Yup, thank you for your hard work. Greetings everyone.」

Hayate seemed to become restless in the face of Ruri's cheerful greeting. Ruri also took the opportunity to give a light greeting to Hayate's subordinates.

「Now then, I'll be heading to the kitchen for a bit, okay?」

Having said that, Ruri headed to where Rio was.

「Iyaa~ Come to think of it, I did smell something exceptionally good before coming in. Tonight's meal seems to be even more impressive than usual.」

Looking at the dishes Rio prepared, Ruri proclaimed happily. Her expression was no different than that of a hungry puppy eagerly awaiting its meal.

「It'll be done soon so please wash your hands first.」

「Okay, thanks~ Wasn't it difficult making so many dishes by yourself? Thank you for your hard work. I'll help with setting the table.」

Expressing her gratitude, Ruri washed her hands and began helping Rio serve the dishes.

「This is... I'd never have expected to be treated to such a luxurious meal and it isn't dried meat either. It must've taken quite a lot of effort to prepare such a meal... I thank you from the bottom of my heart.」

Hayate spoke in astonishment upon seeing the dishes. He was able to tell at just a glance that the meat served was fresh and not preserved in any way. Even though he knew a hunter resided in the village, it was impossible to prepare so much fresh meat in such a short amount time.

「Ahaha, it's because Rio is an excellent hunter. He probably caught quite a haul today.」

Ruri informed them of how they were able to procure so much fresh meat.

「O~h, so it was Rio-dono who hunted for this meat. If I'm not mistaken, I was told Rio-dono also did the cooking, right? That is quite admirable for a man.」

Hearing her explanation, Hayate praised Rio.

The travelling party which had been unable to enjoy a satisfying meal for a while eyed the feast before them with sparkling eyes.
Everybody took their places around the table.

「I tried recreating a dish I came across during my travels abroad. Please, enjoy.」

With Rio's words as the cue, dinner started.

「Saga-dono, I would recommend you to start with this dish of Renou bird.」

Rio gave his recommendation to Hayate who sat across from him.

「Hou~ What a splendid aroma, it really stimulates the appetite. Then, I will be trying this first at the chef's recommendation.」

Following Rio's suggestion, Hayate extended his chopsticks towards the Renou bird, splitting the meat into smaller pieces.

「I roasted the Renou bird with herbs giving it its unique aroma.」

Hayate's nose twitched at Rio's enticing description.

「Fumu, surely... it's delicious!」

While thoroughly enjoying the appetizing aroma tickling his nose and stimulating his appetite, Hayate brought a slice of meat into his mouth. At that moment, the juices of the Renou exploded in his mouth. Hayate's eyes widened in surprised as he exclaimed his impressions.

「Hee~ to actually impress Hayate-sama to such an extent, this...」

While watching from the side, one of Hayate's adjutants also reached for a piece of the Renou bird.

As he brought the meat towards his mouth in the same way—

「In— Incredible!」

He also leaked a sigh of admiration similar to Hayate.

The others were also tempted by the first two's reaction and began extending their chopsticks towards the Renou bird, soon to be followed by the sounds of smacking lips.

「What kinds of seasonings did you use to produce such a flavour?」

Being deeply intrigued by the dish's rich flavour, Hayate inquired Rio about his methods.

「I added salt, pepper, a herb by the name of rosemary, olive oil, and a dash of honey to really bring out the flavour」

The original recipe also included garlic but some people disliked how it overpowered the herbs, leading to a decline in taste.

Rio had lined up the dishes in order to bring the most potential out of each dish, but he allowed everybody to choose the dishes to their liking.

「Fumu, I'm not familiar with most of the ingredients besides salt, pepper, and honey. Speaking of pepper, isn't it the specialty product of Torikonoria? I heard it has a tingling sensation, I see now...」

Savouring the taste of the meat, Hayate spoke in a low voice.

「Indeed, it was something I obtained during my travels.」

Blessed with mild weather year round, Torikonoria was a country situated towards the southwestern region of Yagumo. However, Rio had never journeyed there before.

In fact, some spices like pepper were successfully cultivated in some countries in Strahl, but Rio received most of his supply of spices from the Seirei no Tami village where large amounts were cultivated.

「I see. To treat us with such valuable spices, allow me to express my sincerest gratitude. Will you be willing to share with me tales of your travels later?」

「Sure, I don't mind.」

「Thank you.」

After performing a splendid bow, Hayate resumed his meal.
Rio also began his meal.

Everybody else had already started eating in silence. Thanks to the unparalleled compatibility of the Renou bird and white rice, everybody's chopsticks continued moving uninterrupted.

The miso soup was also suitably seasoned, prompting further inquiries about its recipe.

Towards such appetizing dishes, Hayate and his adjutants silently devoured their meals as if in a trance.

Afterwards, the village's specialty sake was served and soon enough, the men slowly became intoxicated.

「You guys, don't drink too much or else you'll be hungover tomorrow...」

Hayate gave his subordinates a tired warning when he saw their faces turning red.

「Haha, duly noted, chief.」

His subordinates answered him with wry smiles.

Although their mood slackened somewhat, they could not afford to behave irresponsibly before their superior.

Keeping that in mind, they continued drinking in moderation.

On the other hand, Hayate did not touch the sake at all.

Judging from his appearance, it was not because he could not drink, but rather that he would not drink while on the job, even when resting.

He was a very serious person.

「You won't drink, Rio-dono? There's no need to hold back because of me, you know.」

Seeing Rio, who was the youngest at the table, trying to keep him company and refraining from drinking, Hayate worriedly urged him not to mind.

「It's alright, I still have to clean up afterwards and I can't be tardy with my daily training.」

Rio gave his reason as to why he also refrained from drinking.

Ever since he started living in the village, he would be caught up with helping out around the village during the day so he made sure to always leave some time at night for training.

Even when he drank, he would do so after training.

「Ah, so you study martial arts. I expected as much judging from your center of gravity and the way you move your feet.」

「Indeed, I do. Well, it's just at the level of a hobby, though.」

「There's no need to be so modest. To have journeyed alone at your age is a testament to your capabilities.」

Hayate praised Rio, showing him a kind smile. Ferocious wild animals, hostile monsters, and bandits, there were various dangers one could encounter during their travels. One required some degree of skill in martial arts, otherwise, a trip alone would be suicidal.

Usually, travelling was done in groups.

However, in Rio's case, both his method of movement and speed could not be matched by an average human. Hayate did not know of this fact but still regarded him as a capable person on the basis that he was able to travel alone.

「I said it before but would you mind sharing stories of your journey with me? I've travelled from village to village but have yet to travel to another country.」

With eyes radiating with curiosity, Hayate requested to hear about Rio's travels.

「Sure, if you're fine with my stories—」

Giving a light nod, Rio recounted stories of his journey while omitting sensitive topics.

「I see. So your parents are Yuba-dono's old acquaintances and you're journeying to seek your loved one. As I thought, you're clearly not your average person.」

Having heard a portion of Rio's story, Hayate spoke a few words of admiration.

「No, you overestimate me.」

Rio lightly shook his head in embarrassment, though a slight smile could be seen.

From their talk, Rio understood that Hayate was not a person who would needlessly praise others.

Rio was also the type of person who became embarrassed when praised so straightforwardly.

As he continued recounting his stories—

「By the way, was Rio-dono named after the ancient King Ryo?」

Hayate suddenly threw out such a question.

「Ryo? No, I've never heard of such a person...」

Although the two names were pronounced identically, Rio showed a puzzled expression because it was not a name familiar to him.

「Fumu, so that's how it is. Well, it's the name of a legendary king, though nothing but verbal stories remain of his legend. Even then, not much is known about him.」

Hayate began reciting stories of the legendary king.
It all began over a thousand years ago.
Legend had it that a king ruled over a dynasty that stretched over the lands of what was now the Karasuki Kingdom.
Strong, wise, and compassionate, he was truly an excellent king.
Gaining the love of his people, many gathered around him.
However, he was far too smart.
And far too kind.
As a result, few knew of his true self.
Even so, he was not lonely.
There was one person who truly understood him.
That was why he was able to keep persevering for his people.
However, on one occasion, an unavoidable disaster occurred producing many victims.

Having believed that Ryo was an omnipotent king, the people were infuriated about the victims.
Having their expectations betrayed, his people placed all the blame on him.
When Ryo apologized for his failure, he bore all responsibility and declared a reform for the dynasty.
And thus gave birth to the present Karasuki Kingdom.
Thanks to his efforts, the country was greatly stabilized a short while later.
Looking back, if the event did not produce any victims, the country would surely have fallen.
It was then, for the first time, did the people understand Ryo's greatness.
However, by that time, Ryo's country was already long gone.
The king of the Karasuki Kingdom at that time was Ryo's former subordinate.
Wanting to show his appreciation to his former king, he ordered for Ryo's

exploits be retold and passed down.

A part of his legend still existed to this very day, having been passed down as per tradition.

「So such a king existed? This is the first time I've ever heard about it.」

「Well, it's doubtful whether he truly existed or not. It's not a very well-known legend either. When I heard the story from my father for the first time, I pitied the king, but recently I've come to have a different opinion. In any case, I think it's a good name, it suits you really well...」

Hayate revealed a light smile.

He seemed to be fond of the story.

「Hayate-sama, Rio, please have some tea.」

Ruri came over with tea.

「Ah, sorry, Ruri-san. I forgot to clean up.」

Rio apologized to Ruri since she had already put away most of the dishes while he was talking to Hayate.

「Don't worry about it. Lately, Rio has been preparing dinner for us so this much is nothing. Here you are, Hayate-sama.」

Smiling sweetly, Ruri served Hayate some tea.

「Th— Thank you for the tea!」

Hayate's movements became evidently stiff.

Rio heartwarmingly watched his awkward behaviour.

He had a childish and clumsy side to him, but Hayate was a sincere and honest person.

Rio had heard that Hayate was just shy of turning eighteen and he came from a distinguished samurai family.

Despite originating from a high ranking family, he did not recklessly abuse his authority.

A certain other noble³ could really take a page or two out of his book.

However, while Hayate usually displayed a dignified personality, when he meets Ruri, he would suddenly show a completely innocent reaction.

It was obvious what kinds of feelings he harboured for Ruri.

「Ahaha. Though, I don't know whether such humble tea will be to your liking.」

Ruri directed a sweet smile at Hayate.

「Th— That's not true at all. This tea is brewed by Ruri-dono after all. No other tea is even comparable.」

Before even tasting it, Hayate already started praising Ruri's tea.

「E~eh? It's just common village tea, you know. You haven't even drank yet, geez.」

Having received so much praise, Ruri laughed shyly. She seemed to have misunderstood his compliments.

(There's no mistake.)

Hayate's behaviour only served to further strengthen Rio's conviction. That was not mere flattery but rather his true feelings.

Without a doubt, Rio was convinced that Hayate was in love with Ruri.

His feelings could be read like an open book.

Still, it did not come at a surprise.

Ruri was an extremely attractive girl, even from the perspective of a cousin.

Both her appearance and personality were highly desirable; her beauty was like a flower blooming in an open field.

Many of the young men in the village also competed for Ruri's affection.

As a result, Shin, who acted as the leader of the young men in the village, held a sense of rivalry towards Rio.

It was only natural that they were jealous since there was a man living under the same roof as the one they yearned for.

Of course, the suspicions pertaining to Ruri and Rio's relationship were false.

Rio already had someone else in his heart and it was a fact that Ruri was privy to.

Perhaps it was because Ruri subconsciously knew that they were cousins that she treated Rio as her own brother.

Or perhaps she saw her deceased younger brother in him.

As such, the young village men's fears were groundless.

While these feelings did prove troublesome for Rio, it was not like he did not understand where they were coming from. Therefore, Rio warded off their jealousy as if it was just a mild breeze. However, they found Rio's attitude unbearable and it only served to further their animosity. Still, they did not intend on causing him any trouble. Furthermore, they could not overcome the feelings of rooting for Ruri's love either.

Nevertheless, Rio wanted to somehow support the Hayate before him. If praying for his cousin's future stability, rather than being tied down by a man of the village, Hayate had a much better prospect. However, that was just Rio's opinion, the outcome would largely depend on Hayate's character. Despite having just met, in one way or another, Rio felt that Hayate would surely cherish Ruri all throughout his life.

Still, in the end, it was up to how Ruri felt about him and if there was a problem in regards to the difference in their social statuses. If Ruri fell in love with somebody from the village, Rio would still support her decision. However, despite the fact that she would be soon reaching the suitable marriage age, he did not see any signs of interest from the person herself. He had never heard her talk about any man nor did she seem to recognize any of the village men's approaches. Yet, because of how she treated all the members of the opposing sex equally, it only served to further fuel their misunderstandings.

As for the issue regarding the difference in social statuses, Rio had no way of knowing if it would pose a problem since he was not acquainted with this country's marriage customs in regards to nobility. Regardless, he was at least certain that Hayate was in love with Ruri. Seeing that was the case, he would not hesitate to support the man before him. Rio managed to have Ruri, who brought them tea, join their conversation and allowed the two to converse. Although he was a bit awkward, Hayate fully enjoyed his conversation with Ruri and occasionally sent a thankful glance towards Rio.

The dreamlike moment for Hayate ended in no time and bedtime arrived all too soon.

「Shall we end it here?」

Without becoming too infatuated in his conversation with Ruri, Hayate knew when it was time to retire.

Rio also felt that it was a suitable time to turn in.

After tidying up after dinner, he led Hayate's party to their room and Rio performed his daily training in the garden.

He did not use body-strengthening nor did he enhance his physical abilities, rather he just single-mindedly rehearsed his swings.

Occasionally, under the cover of night, a leaf would flutter down from one of the nearby trees and Rio would swing at it.

Slicing through the leaf, Rio would then return to repeatedly practicing his swings.

Working up a sweat, a steam-like white haze rose from his body.

The one-handed mithril sword cut through the air and stopped at eye level.

「...Fuh.」

Rio sheathed his sword and exhaled deeply.

「I guess that should be enough for today.」

Content with the training he did, he muttered in satisfaction and turned around to head back.

At that moment, Rio turned towards the trees having noticed that he was being observed from a distance.

「...」

The other party was standing still at quite a distance.

He could not make out the other party's figure due to the darkness of the night, but he was sure somebody was watching him.

As a result of his intense training, even from afar, the other party should have been able to notice him.

There were no signs that an intruder had infiltrated the village.

In fact, Rio had secretly set up a magic barrier around the village, allowing him

to detect any intruders.

That was why Rio would have known immediately if an intruder had entered the village.

However, he did not sense a reaction from the barrier.

Therefore, it had to be somebody from within the village.

Most, if not all, of the villagers, were already asleep by this time, but of course, it did not mean nobody ever went outside in the middle of the night.

Still, it was not unreasonable to be suspicious of somebody moving around at night.

While mulling over the issue, Rio recalled some unpleasant memories but decided to return to the house anyhow.

After washing down his body, Rio took a quick drink and returned to his room, retiring for the night.

-
1. TL : Any idea what kind of bird this is [レンオウ鳥]? ☐
 2. ED: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haori> ☐
 3. TL : He's referring to Latifa step brother, Shit; PF: I thought he was referring to the idiot from the next village over; ED: Both; PF2: he can't be talking about that village idiot as he said noble and might be talking about most nobles in general since he has met quite a bit of bad ones ☐

Translator: Cnine
Editor: Vrryou
Proofreader: SenjiQ

Chapter 36: Yobai

Rewinding time a bit...

At about the time when Hayate's group arrived in the village and when Rio was out hunting, Gon's group did not bother repairing their cart at all and were loafing around in the guest house.

Despite it still being early in the day, they were already downing alcohol while conversing and discussing plans for the coming night.

Bang Suddenly, the door was blown open.

Gon and the others turned their eyes towards the door, wondering who dared to rudely intrude upon them.

There, stood a boy who had just hit puberty.

「Haa, haa...」

For some reason, the boy was out of breath, seeming to have rushed back into the house.

The boy was the youngest member of Gon's group and was often treated as their maid. He was tasked with repairing the broken cart by himself.

「What is it now? Are you done fixing the cart?」

If other villagers came, it would be difficult to talk in secret.

Having their merry conversation interrupted, Gon asked in a sullen mood.

「A— Aniki! Bad news! The tax collectors came!」

The boy quickly reported his findings while gasping for breath.

「Ah? Tax collectors?」

Gon repeated dubiously.

Tax collection was an important job to financially support the country. However, the job itself was extremely demanding, requiring one to be highly skilled in multiple disciplines.

Suitable education and the ability to perform paperwork were necessary since the tax collector needed to confirm whether the number of taxed crops were correct.

They were also generally disliked by villagers due to the nature of their job so a strong mind was needed.

Seeing that taxes needed to be collected from multiple villages, travel between them was also necessary and there existed the risk of being attacked by thieves, monsters, and wild animals. As such, possessing the strength to deal with these dangers was also mandatory.

That was why, when choosing somebody for the position of tax collector, they must not only excel in combat but also be well educated and have a firm temperament. It was an important position that many vied for, but few achieve. In other words, tax collectors were comprised of elites excelling in both literary and martial arts.

This was common knowledge among all villagers.

Therefore, to perform yobai in a house where such a person was staying would be a little... no, it could be considered to be a completely reckless act.

「N— No, it's just that it might be a bit troublesome. I heard that tax collectors are really strong...」

As if being overwhelmed by the pressure Gon exuded, the boy took a step back while speaking.

It was now the season for tax collection.

Therefore it was not out of the ordinary for the tax collectors to have arrived. However, seeing that they arrived the day when Gon was prepared to execute his plan, the boy could not help but assume that it would be unwise to proceed. It was no wonder that the boy got worked up after hearing the news.

「Ha~h, look, they have nothing to do with this. We're still doing it tonight.」

However, Gon declared the plan's execution with a resolute look in his eyes. The others, however, showed hesitation in the face of Gon's confidence.

「A— Are you serious? As expected of Aniki, to not even flinch at tax collectors...」

One of the cronies timidly praised him.

While agreeing with the crony in their minds, the other men were waiting for Gon's next words.

「Oh? There won't be a problem since everybody'll be asleep. They may be

samurai but they're as defenseless as a newborn baby when they're asleep.」

However, Gon cut down their worries in a single statement.

「Th— That's not it, I mean, something might happen but...」

Be it samurai or tax collector, once asleep, there was nothing to be afraid of. That was what Gon wanted to convey.

For them who were complete novices when it came to fighting, there was no way they could perceive vague signs such as bloodthirst, killing intent, and spatial awareness.

Therefore, they believed it would certainly be safe.

「Well, I'll be the one performing yobai. Feel free to come peep if you want. But, when I return tomorrow morning, don't be showing me any disappointed faces, okay?」

Smiling fearlessly, Gon looked at his men.

Having been indirectly called cowards, the men's pride were provoked.

And that was not all.

They were all males in the midst of puberty.

Their interests towards the opposing sex and lovemaking were at their peak.

For them, who were weary from being constantly scorned by the girls in their village, such desires were even further intensified.

Therefore, the combination of both their sex drives and intoxication made them more daring than usual.

「Well, decide by tonight. I'll wake you up before leaving so be sure not regret your decisions.」

Having said that, Gon continued downing liquor with a satisfied expression.

And so, came the long awaited time, night had already descended.

When all the villagers had turned in, Gon woke up his cronies telling them that the time had come.

「Let's go.」

Brimming with confidence, Gon leisurely left the guest house.

「O— Oi. What should we do? Gon-san's already left...」

Looking at Gon's departing figure, one man spoke in an eager voice.

「E— Even if you ask...」

Gulp Multiple sounds of the men swallowing their saliva could be heard. A short moment of silence followed. Their hearts were racing.

「Heh, hehe... I'm going.」

And then, one man suddenly stood up while muttering. He walked straight towards the door and headed outside. The remaining men looked at each other in darkness.

「Let's... go...?」

One person stood up, followed by another, and yet another; as if they were being lured by an irresistible bait, they began leaving.

It was unlikely anybody would notice them since it was currently midnight. To witness the love scene of Ruri. When that thought crossed their minds, none of them could go against their carnal desires.

They traversed the darkness in single file in the direction of Yuba's house. It was an uncivilized, foolish, and reprehensible act.

At that time, a lone figure stole up to Yuba, the village chief's house. The intruder went in without hesitation. He had entered the village chief's house once before and scouted out the objective's location. That was how the intruder knew where to go without losing his way. Arriving at the door to his objective, the intruder halted his steps.

He carefully opened the wooden sliding door. *Rattle Rattle* The door audibly rattled. Fortunately, Ruri did not wake up, continuing sleeping peacefully on top of her negoza¹. After confirming that Ruri was still sleeping soundly inside, the trespasser entered the room and quietly approached her side. A vulgar smile crept onto his face.

「Hehe...」

「^^.....」

When he stripped off the thick kimono which was being used as a substitute for a futon, Ruri's body, clad in her nightwear, was revealed.

The man's lust shot through the roof the moment he saw her defenseless figure.

「Haa... Haa...」

Unable to endure it any longer, the man straddled Ruri and groped her body.

「N...h!?!」

Sensing something was wrong, Ruri's eyes groggily opened.

When she noticed a large figure mounting her, her consciousness cleared in an instant and she prepared to cry out.

However, the man covered her mouth.

「Don't make a ruckus. Behave yourself and soon enough, you'll be having the time of your life.」

The man warned her before bringing his face towards her to kiss her.

As a result of that, Ruri was able to identify her assailant.

It was the one man that even Ruri had difficulty dealing with.

During their childhood, on their first meeting, Ruri treated him like any other boy.

However, being the condescending person he was, Gon harassed her in a variety of ways. Gradually, she grew to dislike him despite having never bored any ill feelings towards anybody else.

Recently, he even had the gall to publicly declare her as his wife. It was an event Ruri remembered with bitter disgust.

「Nnh~! Nnh, Nnnhhh~!!!」

Being attacked by such a man, despair washed over her.

Although she desperately tried to break free from his restraints, Gon's large build rendered her efforts futile.

「Che—」

Gon quietly clicked his tongue, having become fed up with Ruri's resistance. He threw a powerful punch right beside Ruri's face. *Thud* A dull sound resounded as his huge fist hit the floor. *Twitch* Ruri's body stiffened up.

「Understand?」

Gon spoke in a low voice. With a stern expression, he aimed his fist at Ruri's face this time and swung it down. However, Gon stopped right before his fist connected with her face.

「Should I hit your stomach the next time you start struggling?」

Gon looked directly into her eyes and spoke in a threatening voice. All remaining strength left Ruri's body as she lost the will to resist and her body began to shiver.

「Don't struggle and keep quiet.」

Ruri grimaced when the scent of his breath mixed with alcohol reached her nose.

「Understood? Huh? If you understand, then nod.」

At his words, Ruri gave a slight nod.

「Uuu— Gusuu—」

Overwhelmed by fear, Ruri silently wept.

「Heh~ so it instantly changes to crying. Now then, shall I have a taste?」

Right when he was about to lift Ruri's skirt—

「Ruri!」

Rio came barging in through the window with a panicked cry.

「Nn— Nnnhhh!!!」

Although it was ever so slight, power began to return to Ruri's body and a muffled scream was heard in the room.

Rio grimaced upon hearing her pained voice.

When Rio was greeted with the scene of Ruri being pinned down by a large man, Rio instantly closed the distance between them.

「Na—!？」

Gon could only let out a pathetic cry at the opponent who suddenly appeared before him.

Gon tried to turn around and intercept Rio but his arm was caught and before he realised what was happening, he was already flying across the room.

「Gah!」

Gon briefly experienced a floating sensation before crashing into the floor like a sack of potatoes.

The air in his lungs was forcefully expelled as the whole house shook from the impact.

「Gaha— Gah, gah, ahh, ah, ahah...」

Unable to perform Ukemi², Gon fell flat on his back and was unable to get his breathing under control.

Rio grabbed Gon by his collar, lifted up his huge body, and drove a fist into Gon's face.

「Gah!!!」

A dull gasp leaked from Gon's lips.

However, Rio did not stop there and continued pummeling Gon's face. Like hell would he be allowed to faint so easily.

He would beat Gon towards an inch of his life without letting him lose consciousness.

And then at the end, he would kill him.

A torrent of hatred and negativity currently swirled inside Rio's head.

「Ah... —ugh... Aah—」

Unable to catch his breath, an inaudible cry was the only thing able to escape his bloodied lips.

However, Rio was not finished with him yet and continued to mercilessly bash Gon's face.

Without strengthening his body nor enhancing his strength, Rio kept driving his fists into Gon's face while ignoring the pain accumulating in his fists.

「Don't fuck with me!」

Tears formed in the corner of Rio's eyes as he shouted.

Ruri cowered in fear when she saw Rio ruthlessly beat up Gon.

Had it been his usual self, Rio would have quickly sensed her fear. However, in his current state, he did not notice at all.

That was just how enraged he was.

Ruri was unable to make out Rio's tears because of how dark it was.

All she could sense was his anger and violence; she could not understand any of the other complex emotions currently swirling within him.

Thus, Ruri could only tremble in fear at the bloodcurdling scene before her.



「Wa— Wait! Rio-dono! Any more and he'll die!」

A voice of restraint resounded in the room where Rio was currently straddling Gon and repeatedly driving his fists into Gon's face. The voice belonged to Hayate.

Die?

That was obvious.

This bastard deserves it.

Hayate's voice reached his ears but Rio ignored him and continued hitting Gon. However, Hayate held down his arms.

「Calm down, I understand your anger, but Ruri-dono is scared!」

When Hayate said that, Rio took a quick glance at Ruri.

「That man will receive a proper punishment later, but we need still need to interrogate him. So please restrain yourself, I beg of you!」

Hayate tried his best to soothe Rio's anger.

It was not an appeal out of sympathy for Gon.

Hayate's expression of self-restraint was proof of that.

However, if he allowed Gon to be murdered now, Ruri's room would be stained with his blood and it may likely become a traumatic event for Ruri.

Hayate was slightly more levelheaded than Rio because he was aware of that fact.

Deep down, he also took pleasure in seeing Rio thoroughly thrash Gon.

As for Rio, he wanted to continue hammering Gon's face until his neck broke. However, when he caught sight of Ruri's trembling figure on top of the futon— He also noticed that Hayate's hands that were holding him down were also shaking—

Finally, Rio relaxed his clenched fists.

「Haah...」

Rio let out a deep sigh in frustration.

His anger had still not completely died down yet; he still wanted to take it out on something.

Gon's swollen face came into view when he looked down again. Letting go of Gon's collar, Rio pushed him away and stood up.

「Gah.」

Gon's head hit the floor like a brick accompanied by a pained grunt. His face was completely swollen and bruised creating a revolting sight.

「Hyu— Hyuhaa— Haa...」

When both Gon's body hit the floor and the shock transmitted to his head, his breathing became ragged again.

Rio did not feel a shred of guilt as he gazed at Gon's battered figure.

Serves you right.

In his mind, Rio cursed Gon with all his might.

「Ah... —aa, a—」

Everytime air entered his lungs, a small groan leaked from Gon's mouth. At such a tragic sight, Rio stared at him without a trace of his usual wry smile.

「What happened!?!」

Noticing the uproar, Yuba and Hayate's subordinates rushed into the room.

「It was a rapist. Yuba-dono, please confirm Ruri-dono's condition first.」

Hayate briefly explained the situation to the bewildered Yuba.

「Wha— ...Un— Understood.」

Despite still being in shock, Yuba quickly processed the situation and made her way towards Ruri's side.

「The rest of you, restrain the rest of the fainted men outside. They're accomplices who tried to peep on the attempted rape.」

Hayate proceeded to give out orders to his subordinates in a cold voice.

Hayate began treating Gon's face using Spirit Arts.

However, perhaps it was because he was not very skilled with healing using Spirit Arts, or that it was intentional, but Gon's face was still swollen after being treated.

From the fact that the treatment took quite a while, it was probably the former.

Rio did not feel compelled to treat such a despicable man at all.

He continued staring at Gon in silence.

Standing where he was, he could not quell the burning hatred seething within him no matter how much time passed.

Just the sight of Gon's face would reignite his anger.

Rio closed his eyes and took a deep breath to calm himself.

He would have probably beaten Gon to death had Hayate not stopped him back then.

Hatred and anger had overtaken him then.

Rio held an abnormal amount of enmity towards the crime known as rape. It stemmed from his childhood when his mother was raped before him.

And just now, the scene of Gon attempting to rape Ruri caused Rio to have flashbacks.

At that moment—

He recalled it.

The deep, primitive, dark instincts and desires of a human being.

Just thinking about those emotions made him feel nauseous.

Even though Rio, himself, was aware that, the part of him as Amakawa Haruto had been deliberately avoiding such thoughts.

The reason was simply because such pitch black emotions were being carried by his counterpart.

So that he would never be embroiled in such emotions—

So that he would never be dominated by such emotions—

So that he would never act upon those emotions—

That was how Rio had been living up until now.

It was a commitment he was determined to never stray from, even after all that just happened.

But—

This had nothing to do with rationale.

This had nothing to do with morals.

The only thing that mattered was that a trash of society acting high and mighty whilst preying on the weak did not deserve to be left alive.

For such bastards who do not know when to draw the line—

That was what he thought.

Such trash needed to experience pain— No, they needed to both experience

pain and learn their wrongs. However, even if they were beaten and accidentally killed, that would be fine too.

Those kinds of people shamelessly preyed on others solely to gloat to other similar trash.

They were beings who had no self-restraint, succumbing to their instincts and desires.

That was why, from now on, if such a scum of society ever dared to lay their hands on Rio or his loved ones, he would have no qualms with retaliating. It was then that something within him broke.

On that day, something evil, something foul, was born in Rio. It was not something as simple as bloodthirst. It was something more profound, more sinister, more sorrowful— However, it was suppressed through sheer willpower.

How long would it remain that way? Rio was drawn into a whirlpool of thought before he realised it. He finally opened his eyes.

In front of him was Hayate vigorously interrogating Gon without even bothering to mask his contempt. His love interest was assaulted by that man. In truth, for Hayate who held a strong sense of justice, his anger was probably much more than what he showed. Rio watched the scene with a blank expression.

「You bastard! It's not over yet!」

Although Gon's face was still swollen, he seemed capable of coherent speech thanks to Hayate's treatment. Gon shouted at Rio with such anger and bloodthirst that any other person would have recoiled.

「And?」

In a voice devoid of any emotion, Rio calmly answered Gon's provocation with a dead stare. It was a bone-chilling stare; one that regarded its target as something less than human.

「Tsu!」

For Gon, it was an unbearable disgrace.
For his entire existence to be denied, it was the first time he had suffered such humiliation.

It was an emotion on the verge of exploding—

「OAAA!!! LET GO OF ME!!!」

Like a madman, Gon roared at Hayate who was holding him down.
Unfortunately for him, Hayate's restraint was flawless and Gon could not brute force his way out of it.

「Pathetic.」

Rio threw a word at Gon, injuring what was left of his pitiful pride.

「Ba— Bastard! You son of a bitch! It's definitely not over yet!」

Gon scowled at Rio as if he was his sworn enemy.
However, Rio had already lost interest in Gon and shifted his eyes towards Hayate.

「Saga-dono, have you heard everything you wanted to hear?」

「Y— Yeah. This is enough.」

He shivered under Rio icy gaze.
The moment when their gazes overlapped, Hayate forgot all about Gon and almost subconsciously took a step back.
Only his dignity as a samurai was able to hold him back.

「Is that so? Then, the verdict?」

It was undoubtedly an appropriate inquiry at that moment.
However, Hayate felt reluctant to answer.

「Rape is a grave offense, even if it's just an attempt. More so, he was caught in the act in addition to having a witness, at worst he must be prepared to be executed on the spot. But, if he's handed over to authorities, he can either expect capital punishment or become a crime slave. As for the rest of the voyeurs, if they're handed over, the most they'll receive will be several lashes...」

For a person from the modern era, such punishment would be seen as barbaric.

Nevertheless, this was not the modern era. In this world, an attempt on one's life, body, or property were commonly settled by the people without needing to involve authorities.

The sentence for the guilty ranged from reconciliation, arbitration, duels, and mortal combat. Fundamentally, the perpetrator must suffer damage equal to or greater than what their crime caused.

Even if the convict is killed as a result of their punishment, the person carrying out the punishment would not be held responsible.

Since rape was considered an extremely grave offence, its punishment was on par with murder.

Still, there existed a custom encouraging the silencing of the victim. If the victim was threatened into submission, the perpetrator would get off scot free.

The weak could only submit to the strong.

Fools who possessed such a mindset were not few in number either.

One of the reasons behind forming communities such as towns and villages were to deal with those kinds of people, but of course, that did not mean crime could be completely eradicated.

For that reason, a national justice system existed. However, one must be proven guilty in court before they are convicted. Unfortunately, since most crimes were carried out in isolated locations where there are no witnesses, it was difficult to identify the culprit and prove their crime. Without the necessary evidence, judges had difficulty proving the accused's guilt which in turn, did not make for an effective crime deterrent.

Be that as it may, there were multiple witnesses this time, in addition to Hayate's presence, who held an important position within the country. It was likely that they had enough evidence for the country to incriminate Gon. As for the crime slave punishment, it was a sentence where the convicted was forced into manual labour, often in extremely harsh environments where they would more often than not, meet their end. Such environments included mines where toxic gases were present, regions

home to ferocious creatures, battlefields, and other hazardous environments. In a sense, it was a punishment far harsher than death.

「Is that so...?」

Rio had to urge to cut down Gon right where he was. If it was only them two in the room, Gon would have already departed from this world.

However, whether to judge Gon with his own hands or to let the country judge him, was a decision best left for Ruri, the victim, and Yuba, the village chief.

If Rio was allowed to kill Gon in his rage, there was the possibility it would spark discord between their village and Gon's village.

For the time being, it was necessary to discuss matters with Gon's village.

At long last, Rio was finally able to quell his anger. He did not regret beating Gon towards an inch of his life. However, he deeply regretted being blinded by rage and openly embracing the idea of murder.

He took a deep breath, still unable to erase the feelings of remorse.

When he exhaled, Rio directed his eyes towards Ruri—

「Ruri-san, are you alright?」

As if he had transformed into a completely different person from before, Rio gently inquired Ruri about her condition.

「Ye— Yeah. I'm fine... Thank you, Rio.」

Ruri expressed her gratitude with a perplexed face.

It was the usual Rio.

Yet, Ruri shivered when she recalled the cold, merciless Rio from before.

Rio quickly perceived her fear.

Yeah, it's no good.

She was currently in her most vulnerable state.

In such a state, it could not be helped that she would feel frightened.

「I've shown you an unsightly side of me. I'm sorry. Even though it's Ruri-san

who experienced the most pain...」

While showing a bitter expression, Rio offered an apologetic bow to Ruri.

「Y— You don't need to apologize. I'm okay now...」

Despite still being afraid of Rio, Ruri still replied to him.

—Is Rio really alright?

She wanted to know, but she could not bring herself to ask him.

Even if she asked him, she was sure he would not reply honestly, because it was Rio, and he would not want to worry her.

「Yuba-san, Saga-dono. Can I entrust Ruri-san to the two of you?」

Rio informed them of his intention to leave since he no longer had a reason to stay.

He had completely lost himself in anger, made a mess of things, and scared Ruri. He wanted to quickly leave in shame.

He would only get in everyone's way if he stayed.

That was why he would return to his usual self by tomorrow and the usual peace would hopefully return.

Rio convinced himself everything would be fine.

He vowed to protect that peace.

「Of course, you can rely on us. Please go take a rest.」

「Yeah. Leave it to us. My subordinates are questioning the others. You don't have to worry anymore.」

Worrying about Rio's current state of mind, Yuba and Hayate spoke reassuring words to him.

「Sorry. I'll prepare breakfast tomorrow. Please take a rest too, Ruri-san and Yuba-san.」

Leaving a few parting words, Rio bowed deeply and departed from Ruri's room.

Returning to his room, Rio could not fall asleep.

He lamented over the recent events, curled up his body, and trembled throughout the night.

And so, by next morning, Rio had returned to his usual self, as if everything that transpired last night had all been a lie.

1. ED: <https://www.google.ca/search?q=negoza+mat&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjwwe7G6KbOAhWC5oMKHV1>

☐

2. TL: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uke_\(martial_arts\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uke_(martial_arts)) ☐

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Chapter 37: Day of Decision

The following day, the previous night's incident had already spread throughout the village.

That morning, as the villagers began waking up and emerging from their houses, they were greeted with an odd spectacle in the village square. There, Gon and his men were restrained and displayed for all to see. Their faces were red in shame.

One of Hayate's subordinates was standing guard nearby, providing explanations for the passing villagers.

When the villagers heard about the attempted rape and peeping of Ruri, they all directed scornful gazes at Gon.

However, they were relieved to hear that Ruri's chastity was protected thanks to the collective efforts of Rio and Hayate.

The guard proceeded to inform the villagers about how Rio nearly beat Gon to death and how the other voyeurs were left outdoors in the freezing cold autumn night.

The official punishment was going to be decided in a meeting later that day, but Gon being the principal offender, there was no way he would get off easily.

Throughout the day, whenever any of the villagers passed by Rio, they would call out and thank him.

Gon was going to perform yobai.

It was a custom practiced among the villagers where a man would visit a woman in the middle of the night and propose to have sex.

Assuming both parties' feelings were mutual, if the woman gives her consent for sex, the two would become formally engaged.

However, the man must back off if the woman turns down his proposal.

The Karasuki Kingdom, where Rio currently resided, practiced monogamy unlike countries in Strahl.

An exception was only granted to the privileged classes where it was necessary to produce an heir.

Therefore, once a man and woman made a pledge to one another unless there was a major issue, they would remain married for the rest of their lives.

As a result, a woman's virginity was extremely important.

It was socially unacceptable to be unfaithful, one must only dedicate his or her life to their significant other.

That was why rape was a grave offence on par with murder and arson in the Karasuki Kingdom.

That was to say nothing of what began as a yobai ended up as a rape attempt. It was an absolutely unforgivable deed.

In this incident, Gon abused the yobai custom and threatened Ruri into agreeing that it was consensual.

No further explanation was needed for anybody to understand just how heavy the crime was.

Fortunately, the incident only ended up as an attempt and Ruri's chastity was preserved.

However, a deep scar that should have never existed was left on her heart.

Gon was now on shameful display in the village square. To the Gon who became conceited, overconfident of his own strength and as a result, straying from the correct path, nobody felt pity for him.

As for the punishment for Gon and the voyeurs, it was decided to call the village chief of Gon's village over to discuss the issue.

Some of the people currently staying in the village returned to the other village to call the village chief.

It would take several days to decide on a suitable punishment for Gon and the others.

Although the punishment had not been decided upon yet, it was not unheard of for rape victims to only receive monetary compensation.

Whether he was to be judged by their hands or by the country and made into a crime slave, Gon's future seemed bleak regardless.

In addition, Hayate had pledged to act as a witness if Gon was put on trial.

His punishment was as good as decided.

As the rumour made its way through the village, the residents of Yuba's house began eating their breakfast.

「Alright everybody, let's have breakfast.」

Serving the food, Rio spoke in a bright tone.

Rio acted like his usual self as if a demon had been exorcised, as if yesterday's frenzy was all a lie.

「O— Okay...」

「Su— Sure...」

「Ye— Yeah...」

Despite a veil of darkness covering the room, yesterday, Ruri, Hayate, and Yuba all witnessed Rio's fury last night and they responded in bewilderment. His attitude perplexed them.

As usual, Rio was able to sense their confusion.

He nearly allowed his cheerful mask slip.

However, Rio managed to deceive them with his trademark wry smile.

He wanted to restore the peace between them, even if it was only on the surface and thought now would be his best chance.

「I sincerely apologize to everybody for losing my composure yesterday.」

Rio did not think he could brush off last night's incident and settle it without an apology.

Bewilderment, misgivings, anxiety, those were the feelings they must have felt.

Rio felt that his actions caused them unnecessary grief.

Ruri, in particular, suffered immeasurable hardship.

When she was assaulted by Gon and panicked, far from easing her suffering, Rio only furthered her distress, causing an uproar and scaring her even more.

That was why, right now, he was going to apologize to her and everybody else.

He was truly sorry from the bottom of his heart.

He wanted to restore their relationship from before if possible.

Slight doubts and misgivings may remain but at the very least, he wished to regain their peaceful life, even if it was only on the surface.

It was necessary for him to take the initiative to mend their relationship since he was the one who created the rift.

Those were Rio's thoughts.

Although his apology came as a surprise, it was vital that he emphasized his

sincerity.

Even if it came out as imprudent, delaying it any further would only cause unnecessary worry.

「Haa... if Ruri is unharmed, then I have nothing to say right now.」

「That's right. If Rio-dono permits it, let me say that if at that time, had Rio-dono not intervened, I don't know if I could've held back either.」

Letting out a sigh, Yuba spoke while glancing at Ruri.

Hayate also followed up.

「Rio... are you okay now?」

Ruri voiced her concern despite being hesitant about touching such a sensitive issue.

「I am. Rather than worrying about me, Ruri-san suffered much more than me. I am sorry I frightened you last night.」

はい。

Disregarding his own issues, Rio apologized, lowering his head so that it nearly touched the ground.

「Pl— Please don't be. Rio saved me and... Uhm, it would be a lie if I said I wasn't a bit scared, but Rio became angry for my sake. That's why I'm alright.」

Ruri's words faltered a bit.

Still, a sense of stiffness remained in her voice.

Maybe, it was already impossible to return to exactly how it was before.

That was only natural.

What was she thinking? How did she feel about him? Rio could not read her heart.

However, he knew she was unstable.

This was the result of his actions.

He had to shoulder the responsibility.

Once again, Rio felt the weight of his actions weighing down on him.

「I deeply apologize.」

In a sincere voice, Rio voiced his apology again.

There was nothing more he could do but to rebuild their trust.

And so, they began their meal. At a glance, it seemed like just another peaceful morning.

After finishing up breakfast, Hayate went to work, commanding his men to load the taxed crops onto his carriage since he needed to arrive in the next village by tomorrow morning

On the other hand, Rio went out to help with work around the village.

In the meanwhile, Yuba arranged to have Ruri take a rest for the day.

When Hayate's preparations for departure were completed, the news spread throughout the village and Rio and Ruri gathered in the village square to see him off.

Exchanging farewells, Hayate turned and spoke to Rio.

「Uhm, the matter regarding Rio-dono and Ruri-dono has been weighing on my mind, so may I request a favour?」

Hayate spoke with a slightly regretful and downhearted expression. Although Hayate could not help but worry about Ruri, he could not abandon the mission entrusted to him by the country.

That was why, he had no choice but to, with a heavy heart, rely on Rio.

His words were full of sincerity.

「Yes, of course.」

Requesting permission from Rio was unnecessary since it was only natural for him to accept.

Rio immediately responded in a strong voice.

「It still seems that last night's incident still weighs on her mind. It may be rude of me to ask since we've only just met but nonetheless, please hear me out, please don't do anything that'll cause her any further worries.」

「Yeah... I'll keep that in mind.」

「Mhm, I'm glad. I'd like to talk to Rio-dono some more if the situation allows. I pray we meet again soon.」

Hayate displayed a peaceful smile.

Rio deeply lowered his head.

Finally, they exchanged a firm handshake.

「Hayate-sama.」

Waiting until the two of them wrapped up their conversation, Ruri approached Hayate.

「Ah, Ruri-dono... Is something the matter?」

「Uhm, this...」

Hayate smiled brightly at Ruri.

Ruri shyly reached out, revealing a small baggie in her hands.

「This is?」

Hayate eyed the bag with a puzzled face.

「Uhm, it's a good luck charm. Though, it's a bit frayed since I made it in a hurry. Uhm, I will be praying for your safety.」

What Ruri presented him was a good luck charm unique to this country. Inside the small bag was a strip of wood with the bestower's name engraved on it.

It was believed that when danger befell the recipient of the charm, any harm would be transmitted to the bestower instead.

「Ah— Th— This is! Thank you so much!」

Although Hayate knew of the custom, he never expected to receive one from Ruri causing him both confusion and overwhelming joy.

Deeply moved, he received the charm with trembling hands.

「Yo— You're welcome. You stayed by my side all of last night. This is a token of my appreciation. It's not much but...」

「There's no such thing! It's the best farewell gift I could've ever hoped for. I will treasure Ruri-dono's gift forever!」

Hayate blurted out what could have been taken as a confession with such intensity that it seemed like he was about to break out into a dance at any moment.

Though, the person himself did not seem to notice possible implications of his own words.

Ruri smiled awkwardly at Hayate's excessive reaction.

「I'd also like to give you something in return but... sorry. I will definitely have something prepared the next time I come by. Uhm, I know the emotional wounds you suffered are difficult to bear, but please continue living with a strong will. If there's anything I can do, please don't hesitate to tell me. You can even visit my home in the capital if you need anything.」

「Yes. ...Then, please take care.」

Bidding farewell, Ruri gently wrapped her hands around Hayate's hand that was holding the charm.

Hayate's face immediately turned bright red.

Breaking into the awkward atmosphere—

「Well then, I guess I should pray for your safety as well. Hayate-dono, can I trouble you to deliver this letter to Gouki-dono once you return to the capital?」

Yuba came over while speaking those words.

Twitch Regaining his senses, Hayate's body flinched as he faced Yuba.

Yuba gave him a humouring smile when she saw his reaction.

He lightly cleared his throat and received the presented letter.

Rather than being conveyed orally, the message was written on valuable paper indicating that it was a message of great importance.

「To father? Okay, I will deliver it without fail.」

「You have my thanks. Please be careful not to lose it since it's an important letter.」

「Understood.」

In response to Yuba's warning, Hayate answered in a serious tone.

「I would like to offer my dearest thanks for the hospitality we received this time. Please accept my heartfelt gratitude. Then, let us meet again. I pray for your good health!」

Hayate stored the letter of importance in his breast pocket and bid farewell to all those present.

Floating a fearless expression on his handsome face, Hayate turned on his heel and mounted his horse.

It was a magnificent horse, giving off an impression of strength with its black mane and large build.

Without a doubt, it was considerably fast when sprinting.

However, it only trotted at a steady pace to match the speed of the carriage. After confirming that Hayate had mounted his horse, the coachman signalled his horses to start pulling the carriage.

Katakata The wheels resounded against the road as it slowly pulled away from the village.

Rio and the others saw off Hayate's party with a smile.



And so, two days passed.

The village chief of Gon's village and a man acting as public relations for the trade group were called to the village.

As one would expect, it was to discuss the incident involving Gon and his group. Despite committing a crime within the village's jurisdiction, they were still foreigners belonging to another village.

If they wanted to ignore that fact and have Gon executed, they would have to hand him over to the country to have him publicly condemned.

However, such actions may cause rise to resentment in the future so, for the time being, Gon's village's cooperation was sought.

「So how do you intend on compensating us for this incident?」

For the sake of bringing them up to speed, Yuba recounted the events first before asking for compensation without trying to hide her contempt.

「I see, I must say that I am also greatly appalled at their actions... I extend my deepest apologies for this unfortunate incident.」

「Hee~ You're Gon's father and yet you have no qualms with recognizing his wrongdoings?」

Receiving an unexpectedly calm response from Gon's father, Yuba wrinkled her eyebrows.

「This and that are separate things, don't you agree? We have no say in his punishment at all. However, he's already an adult so we're troubled that you're implying that his actions are our responsibility...」

「What did you say?」

It was a really calm tone.

However, it was an extremely selfish thing to say.

Yuba could not help but become angry at those words.

Rio, who was listening in on their conversation from the side, was also disgusted at Gon's father.

Of course, it was expected for an adult to be responsible for their own actions, even if they grew up into a self-centered individual.

However, part of the fault also lay in the environment he was raised in.

Gon grew up in a village that treated him like a tumour.

If they left him unattended and never scolded him for his wrongdoings, then it was no surprise for him to develop such a character.

As one would guess, that was the environment in which Gon was raised, a household which only prioritized the eldest son and neglected the younger son. Gon's father had quite the nerve to pretend he had no part in his son's actions. Still, he probably would not have been able to become the village chief if he did not act like this.

「The type of person a child grows up to be, reflects the environment they were raised in. Don't you hold some responsibility in shaping his character?」

「It is as you say, but you know, it's also their responsibility to shape their own future. Besides, isn't he going to become a crime slave anyway? He'll be cheaper than a normal slave but you'll still get some money from selling him. That should be enough for compensation.」

Gon's father only gave an evasive answer to Yuba's inquiry.

For Yuba, her precious granddaughter's life was nearly ruined.

A pathetic amount of money as compensation was just insulting.

Judging from the attitude Gon's father held thus far, it was likely that he had already planned on cutting ties with Gon and his group of misfits if a situation like this one arose.

It was a blatantly suspicious attitude.

Amazed by his response, Yuba sent a brief glance in Rio's direction.

Catching her glance, Rio gave a slight nod.

「You should've had something to gain by allowing them to travel with the trade group. Since that was the case, I suggest you utilize them to make amends for the damage they caused. To only consider the benefits and ignore the

possible consequences, isn't that quite a selfish decision?」

「Isn't that right?」

Rio gave an indifferent reply.

Yuba nodded deeply in approval of his words.

As expected, since Gon's father allowed the problem children to act as escorts for the trade group, he had the responsibility of supervising their actions.

He reaped the profits of employing them yet did not want to be associated with them when they caused trouble; such a convenient arrangement was unacceptable.

In modern society, this was a matter of common etiquette, but it was unknown if such manners were also practiced in this world.

「Ugh, but you see...」

As expected, Gon's father became troubled in the face of Rio's argument. However, despite being at a loss for words, he still did not seem to want to accept responsibility.

Before Gon's father arrived in the village, Rio had already consulted Yuba on how to deal with the issue and the current flow of events was within their predictions.

If an understanding between the two parties could not be met, they would seek out alternative avenues of attack to push the discussion forward in their favour. They would have no choice but to take strong measures if the situation called for it.

Rio and Yuba patiently waited for Gon's father to continue.

「This incident will cause me to lose a substantial amount of manpower so it'll be difficult for the future of my village. Since we're both victims here, can we not both just accept our losses and move on?」

Gon's father continued to persistently deny any responsibility in the incident. To also declare himself as a victim was absolutely absurd.

Be that as it may, the number of young men participating in the incident were five, including Gon.

Although it was still unclear as to what kind of punishment they will receive, excluding Gon, even if the others returned to the village, they would no longer be welcome.

What awaited them was a life of social ostracism.

If he had a choice, Gon's father would prefer to exile them, rather than accepting them back into his village.

As a result, his village would lose precious manpower.

It was quite a substantial loss.

「I see. Ah, by the way, we've already seized your trade group's shipment of goods.」

Facing such an obstinate man, Yuba revealed the trump card she had been holding onto thus far.

「Wh— What'd you say!? Isn't that plain robbery!? Don't give that bullshit!」

The change was instantaneous, outraged, Gon's father bolted onto his feet and started shouting.

「Well, hear me out first. I have an offer that'll be beneficial for both of us.」
「...What are the conditions?」

Lured by Yuba's abstruse offer, Gon's father seated himself again.
For the time being, it seemed that there was still room for negotiations.

「First of all, let's assume Gon becomes a crime slave. Do you have any objections to this matter?」

「No...」

It seemed that he had already accepted this as a fact.
Despite being a problem child, Gon was still his son, but he had no choice but to accept the punishment because Gon had committed an unforgivable crime.

「You believe that they should be responsible for their own actions. Those are your thoughts, correct?」

「That's right...」

「Then that makes things a lot easier. I propose that you sell the rest of them off as regular slaves.」

Gon's father showed a perplexed expression at Yuba's proposal.

「But, they didn't commit a crime that would warrant them becoming crime slaves and a lot of them are reaching adulthood. Since they're adults, we'll need

their consent or a reason to sell them as debt slaves. They might have peeped but I doubt they'll agree so easily...」

「They have a debt to Ruri. It's called reparations, you know?」

「No, reparations by itself are not enough to make them into debt slaves.」

Gon's father spoke with a bewildered expression as if he was told something absurd.

For somebody to become a debt slave, a deed stating that they owed money was necessary.

However, reparations was not strictly a monetary debt.

Of course, with cooperation from the perpetrators, reparations could be disguised as monetary debt but it was extremely difficult to gain their cooperation.

In the first place, it was common for perpetrators to ignore reparation payments to their victims if no evident damage was caused.

Therefore, when the victim does suffer damage, reparations would be authorized but it was usually pie in the sky. Reparations by itself were not enough of a reason to have the perpetrator become a debt slave.

「Fumu, you can make up a reason in place of reparations.」

「...Ah, a reason huh?」

「You and those men all bear the responsibility of providing reparations. In other words, if you pay the full compensation out of your own pockets, you can then claim that they now owe their respective reparation amounts to you.」

「Well, that can't...」

However, even if Yuba's proposal was enacted, it would be meaningless if the men had no means to repay Gon's father.

Those who were second sons and below were not allowed a great amount of property so they would be unable to pay for reparations.

That was the reason why Gon's father desperately tried to pin the blame solely on them so his village would not suffer any losses.

From the start, Yuba had not requested reparations from those men but from Gon's father who, being the village chief, would have more than enough to pay the requested amount.

「Then, you admit that you're responsible for paying reparations to Ruri and

will pay the full amount.」

「What are you saying...?」

Gon's father voiced a complaint in astonishment.

With that, the negotiations were back where they started.

Since property that would be collected from the convicted did not exist, despite denying any responsibility on his part, Yuba still demanded him to pay the full amount of reparations.

Gon's father could not understand what her motives were.

「If you do that, they will be forced to borrow money from you, right? It shouldn't be too difficult for you as the village chief to grant them a favour by paying off their debts for them and then writing up a deed. You can easily make them into debt slaves if you follow these steps.」

「!!!」

At last, Gon's father grasped the meaning of Yuba's words.

Up until now, Yuba, Gon's father, and those who sought to harm Ruri were in a 3-way struggle, but Yuba was able to drag Gon's father onto her side.

「You will hand over your shipment of goods to us. But on the other hand, you can sell those men as debt slaves to recoup your loss here. Of course, we'll accept a monetary payment in place of the goods if you prefer. The choice is yours. Those fools will be punished and neither village suffers any loss.」

Only those who sought to harm Ruri were going to be punished.
In other words, they reap what they sow.
However, Gon's father—

「Isn't it just peeping...? To go to such extents...」

He felt a tinge of guilt for them who, despite being problem children, were also residents of his village.

「Are you looking down on the importance of a girl's virginity?」
「N— No...」

Pressured by Yuba, Gon's father's voice faltered.

「Far from trying to stop Gon, they even actively supported his disgusting behaviour. Don't you think this incident is much more severe than merely

peeping?」

「Yeah...」

「They nearly caused irreversible damage to my precious granddaughter. I will not allow them to get off so easily. If you do not accept my conditions, I will forcibly confiscate your goods here and now. Well, it'll likely cause friction between our villages. The decision is up to you.」

「That is...」

Gon's father immediately calculated the possible pros and cons of accepting the deal.

The profits from selling the trade goods in the capital were to support the village for the entirety of the coming year.

It was in no way an unsubstantial amount of money.

However, comparing that amount to selling four slaves in their primes, it was difficult to determine which one would be more profitable.

Rather than children, all four of them were males in their primes so they should generate quite a sum.

In contrast to crime slaves who had no chance of emancipation, regular slaves could earn their freedom once they have worked their sentence.

If they were driven out of the village, at worst they would become bandits.

If that was the case, Gon's father thought that having them reap what they sow may be better than granting them mercy.

「Understood... Then I'll transfer ownership of the goods to you.」

Gon's father decided on selling the men into slavery with his own hands. Rio only stared at him in silence.

Afterwards, Yuba continued negotiations on how to collect on Ruri's reparations.



That evening, Rio made his way to the small hill where his parents' grave was erected.

Lately, he visited their grave almost every day after finishing work.

Signs of autumn could be seen from where he stood.

Standing before the stone pillar acting as his parents' grave, Rio watched as the evening sun started to set, dyeing the sky red.

A few days ago, Rio had lost himself to anger. Despite being able to recover after a single night, it was the first time Rio became strongly aware of the unspeakable anger dwelling within him. For the following few days, he continued fighting against himself.

His own heart could not be easily understood. Rio as himself harboured strong emotions of hatred and vengeance for his mother's murderer. On the other hand, Rio as Amakawa Haruto was unable to forgive the murderer of Rio's mother. However, the implications of the term revenge were too heavy. Up until now, Rio— No, Amakawa Haruto had been actively avoiding his other self. He hesitated on going down a path of no return. Amakawa Haruto had been suppressing Rio's desire for revenge for all this time.

While it may be an imprudent way of putting it, the incident from a few days ago proved to be a good opportunity. The incident allowed him to renew his determination to live in this world. The incident which made him recall the death of his mother cut deep into the darkness of his heart.

Revenge would not fulfill anything for him. Even if he achieved his revenge, only emptiness awaited. Even though his mother was murdered, was he qualified to be an existence who could judge good and evil?¹ He would become no different than the man he resented. He refused to become such an egoist.

Those standing on the sidelines could easily spout such idealistic rhetorics. By not directly addressing the problem but ignoring it and hoping it would go away, Haruto tried to repress the feelings of revenge. Not wanting to face his other self, he denied Rio's existence.

If he did it— He would have no choice but to face the ugliness dwelling within him. He would have no choice but to become aware of his own arrogance. He would have no choice but to open his old wounds that have yet to heal.

These were the reasons why Haruto was afraid of facing his other self. He wanted to keep applying bandages without actually dealing with the infection.

Why? Because it was the easiest way out; it was comforting.

Out of anger, he assumed a defiant attitude so he would not become a selfish person.

Becoming one made him felt like he was desecrating his mother's death. She lost her husband right after giving birth to Rio. Despite leading a difficult life afterwards, she still wholeheartedly loved him so he could not bring himself to become selfish.

Creating such an excuse, Haruto kept running away from Rio.

Indeed, he was a pragmatist.

He resolved to never lose self-control.

He resolved to not act on instincts or emotions.

It did not necessarily mean he would be an intrinsically good person, but at least one who would not bring trouble onto others.

If everybody acted like so, surely the world would become a better place.

Wouldn't that be awfully lovely?

However, even if he lived by such a principle, the world would not follow suit.

He was forcedly made to realise that the world was cruel and unforgiving.

Even seemingly good people held a perverted sense of value.

Life was cheap and malice prevailed.

Greed and emotions made people direct malice towards others.

When one encounters another acting maliciously, they will have no choice but to act human.²

One cannot help but act on desires and emotions.

It is an unavoidable fate.

Rio had encountered several such incidents so far as well.

During each and every one of those times, Rio repressed his desires to protect himself.

Every time he recalled any of the incidents, it left a bitter taste.

Surely, deep down, he understood that it was only a human reaction after all.

If one were to carefully analyze it, revenge was but a concentrated lump of instincts and desires.

It was a fact he could not deny but at the same time, he did not want to face. He would become evasive whenever the thought of revenge crept into his mind; he did not want to admit the ugliness existing inside him.

Although he bore a grudge against the man who lived according to his desires and instincts, to also live in accordance with his own desires and instincts—Impossible.

That was not something he could live with.

However, after experience the turbulence of emotions that day, Rio could not help but notice his hypocrisy.

He was also a human who lived in accordance with his desires and instincts. When he understood that, he became aware of something cold, something sinister, dwelling within him.

Even now he still wanted to continue exercising strict self-restraint, to still live as a rational human being.

However, now that he realised he was merely just like any other human being—Not wanting to face his ugliness and only licking his wounds like a hypocrite, it was no longer a kind of life he wanted to lead.

The world was cruel yet he wanted to follow the most comfortable route in life.

Therefore, from here on out, even if he faces hell itself, he will not run away. He will make decisions based on necessity because he was, and will remain, human no matter how hard he tries.

He will not mind getting his hands dirty if the situation calls for it.

He will no longer go easy on his opponents.

He will no longer run away from the ugliness within him.

Even if all this resolve was just for self-satisfaction, he was going to see them through.

Any sins, any hell, he will shoulder all of it.

He will not run away anymore.

He will no longer try justifying his actions.

For now, Rio decided to return to Strahl to finish his business there.

As long as that man dies, he does not care if he is killed as well.
However, if he survives, he will atone for his sins.
He was irresponsibly advancing ahead.
This was farewell.
Farewell with his former weak self.
Finally, he could proudly say that this was a sincere wish he decided all by himself.
On that day, with renewed determination, discarding his former powerless self, his former grievances, Rio was born anew.

1. TL : Eye for eye, life for life dud!!! SQ : In what way is Rio not a special existence?
Seems like the shorter list; ED: An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind ☐
2. ED: What the author’s trying to say is that it is human to react negatively when encountering negativity ☐
-

ED: Interesting chapter to say the least. Rio has finally had some self-revelations. If this is any indication of his future behaviour, hopefully, the majority of you should be appeased. ...And no, writing paragraphs grieving at his behaviour isn’t going to help.

Translator : Cnine, Vrryou
Editor : Vrryou
Proofreader :

Chapter 38: The Gradual Return of Daily Life

It was the evening of the day the discussion about the incident caused by Gon and his group was held.

「Rio, I'd like to speak to you for a minute. Do you have any time to spare?」

During dinner, after Rio returned from his parents' grave, Yuba spoke to Rio with an air of seriousness.

「Of course, I don't mind...」

Having guessed her intention, Rio agreed to her invitation.

「Come with me for a minute.」

After having put away the dishes, they left Ruri behind and went to Yuba's room where she closed the door.

Judging from her actions, it seemed like it was a talk she did not want Ruri to overhear.

「Sorry for asking you so suddenly. That fool caused an uproar and things have been hectic over the last couple of days. I couldn't find time to speak with you in private.」

「It's not a problem, I'm grateful for what you've done.」

When they entered Yuba's room and settled down, Yuba started the conversation with an apology.

Rio responded with a line of gratitude.

The days after the incident involving Gon were quite turbulent. In the first place, it was the busiest time of the year for the village and that was compounded with arranging the reparation payment settled with Gon's father. With every day being so busy, she could not find time for a calm conversation with Rio.

「What I want to say is, Rio, thank you, and I'm sorry.」

「Thank you and sorry?」

At Yuba's unexpected words, Rio responded in confusion. He could not figure out why he was being thanked or what was done to require an apology.

(It seems this child is not aware why I'm thanking and apologizing to him.)

A tender smile formed on Yuba's face. Staring at Rio, she could see that he carried a strong resemblance with her daughter-in-law, Ayame. Even his uncanny sensitivity for the emotions of others strongly resembled Ayame.

(Zen was a very clumsy child, but, well, I guess there are similarities in that regard as well.)

Zen was taciturn, hard-working, and a man more known for his actions than words. That led to him being easily misunderstood, but there were many who admired his honesty. Yuba felt Rio inherited Zen's temperament since he was not one to talk a lot either.

(Like parent, like child after all...)

Rio was an excellent child who inherited both his parents' positive traits. He was composed to the point where it was difficult to believe he was a boy at a marriageable age. He truly was not a child who would take advantage of others.

She had heard that Rio became an orphan at the tender age of five. How was such a child brought up and how was he able to travel across the continent? Those were details Yuba remained in the dark about. She had only received a vague description of his past. There were several occasions where she wanted to inquire him about it. However, she did not want to ask him about it so brazenly. Rio had only given vague information about his past most likely because he was not comfortable with sharing it.

Having realised that, Yuba refrained from asking for details about his past. That was also the case for Ayame's death. Rio had told her that his mother had passed away. However, he became evasive when asked about the cause.

In any case, Rio was raised in less than ideal conditions and wandered the world all by his lonesome. It was easy to conclude that his life had been filled with hardships until now. And yet, she could not help but admire how he was able to grow up without becoming twisted.

(Towards such a child, my behaviour is no better than an infant's. Age has nothing to do with this. Wherever I could cut corners, I did so.)

Rio's behaviour that night was clearly abnormal. On that evening, Yuba was able to catch a glimpse of Rio's fury that would otherwise be unthinkable of him to display. However, by next morning, that passion was gone, as if it was nothing but a lie. No trace of malice remained and at least on the outside, Rio displayed his regular behaviour. Yuba was able to witness incredible mental fortitude unsuited for a boy so young. That was why during the days after the incident, Yuba extensively depended on Rio whilst citing her lack of free time as an excuse. Indeed, Yuba gave priority to Ruri who seemed much more unstable than Rio.

Ruri was just an ordinary village girl that could be found anywhere. Although she lost both her parents and younger brother at an early age, such a degree of misfortune was not uncommon in the world. Even within the village, she was but an ordinary girl. Such a child living in a peaceful village suddenly came face to face with malice for the first time and was nearly raped. It was without a doubt, a big shock for her and Yuba knew it would carve a deep wound in her heart. Actually, for the past several days, Ruri had been desperately trying to put a strong front. Still, it was evident that she was pushing herself. While it varies from person to person, psychological wounds take a long time to

heal for those who have never been exposed to such things before.

As a result, Yuba paid special attention to Ruri's condition.

Rio and Ruri.

Both were Yuba's cherished grandchildren.

Even if they were raised differently, she equally cared for both of them.

Unfortunately, the reality was that she was one person and therefore could only focus on one at a time.

Other than her daily responsibilities as village chief, she also had to take care of Gon's incident on top of caring for Ruri and Rio. It was not something she could handle alone.

That was why Yuba had to prioritize one over the other.

Realising Rio's strong mental fortitude, Yuba left him unattended for the past several days.

When Rio apologized the morning after the incident, Yuba judged that he would be all right for the time being.

During that morning's breakfast, she could not pry into Rio's past due to the guests they were hosting at the time.

However, even if it was just for a brief moment, she witnessed the eruption of his emotions.

Yuba did not know what kind of past Rio experienced but it was surely a difficult one.

Even if his mental fortitude was strong, the burden on his heart must at least be equal, if not heavier.

Yuba decided that as his grandmother, she would not allow herself to neglect him.

In spite of that, she saw how reliable Rio was and ended up delaying her interactions with him.

「Firstly, let me thank you for what you've done. Thanking for saving Ruri from Gon. And, for these past few days, thank you for assisting me with the negotiations with Gon's father. I am truly grateful for your help.」

Yuba deeply lowered her head while thanking Rio.

「In addition to that, I became too absorbed in my duties that I neglected on checking up on you. I am deeply sorry. It must've been painful for you as well.」

When Yuba raised her head slightly, a bitter expression could be seen on her face.

Seeing Yuba like that, Rio slowly shook his head with a warm smile.

「Please, it is not something to thank me for. We are family. I only did what was natural. That was all. That is why, please do not apologize since it is painful for me as well.」

With his eyes fixed on Yuba, Rio spoke in a clear voice.
Rio said that with clear voice while looking straight into Yuba's eye.
Even though his personalities were clashing internally, Rio felt surprisingly refreshed.

The few days after the incident were painful but now, it was not the case.
His revenge was something he had to take care of by himself.
No matter the pain, it was his burden to carry.
He had no intentions on talking about it with anybody else either.
That was why he would not show any frustration so Yuba would not worry about him.

Ruri's state was much more pressing than his own.
Since that was the case, it was obvious that she should take precedence over him.
That was Rio's rationale.
To not be unsatisfied about that was unthinkable.

Yuba matched Rio's gaze.
A smile floated on his face.
It was a smile of deep understanding, completely like one of a saint.
Like a wide river, it was quiet but contained a powerful might. Yuba found herself unintentionally holding her breath.

「No, but you know...」

For an instant, the figure of Rio from that night flickered into Yuba's mind.
The fury he displayed was abnormal, to say the least.
It was as if he was completely possessed by Asura; just by being in his vicinity, one could sense the dreadful fury.
Regardless, Rio was able to completely regain his composure in a single night.

However, even if he behaved normally in front of everybody like nothing ever happened, it was obvious he was trying to keep up a facade. That was why Yuba was able to predict his state of mind. The other night's frenzy was probably still weighing on his mind. Yet, the Rio before her at the moment did not have a trace of worry. His eyes did not carry a hint of fear or hesitation. Perhaps he came to an inner peace or understanding. It was not something that Yuba could discern.

What was it?
There were a lot of things she wanted to hear from him. However, was it something she was entitled to knowing? Even she had not brought the topic up with Rio. It was the issue pertaining to his parents. Although there was reason Yuba could not bring up the topic, it felt unfair to ask about his past without sharing her own knowledge.

Should I just tell him?
Was what Yuba thought. Still, just the other day, the letter she sent out was to inquire about the matter. It would be best to wait for a response first. Permission to reveal the truth will surely be given. Acting rashly would be unwise.

「I understand... However, it's true that I've placed a lot of burden on you. That's why, please at least let me say this, I am sorry.」

After deliberating for all that time, those were the only words that came out. However, those words carried no lies. Suppressing her wavering heart, Yuba deeply lowered her head to Rio.

「Understood.」

Sensing Yuba's determination, Rio accepted her apology with a wry smile.

「Ruri should have calmed down by now and I think that child wants to apologize to you as well. Will you forgive her?」

「There's nothing for her to apologize for though...」

Perplexed by what Yuba said, Rio could only offer a wry smile.

「It's about her behaviour you know.」

「Her behaviour?」

When Rio asked about it, Yuba looked at him in the eyes with a slight smile.

「You saved that child so I'm sure she's not truly afraid of you. It's just that she's been through a lot and hasn't been able to calm down yet.」

「That is...」

For the past few days, Ruri had been timid in her interactions with Rio. Although she acted as if nothing was out of the ordinary, one could perceive that her behaviour was slightly off.

It was something that Rio was able to notice as well.

However, on that night, Rio had unleashed his bloodthirst without holding back and pummeled Gon towards an inch of his life.

As a person unaccustomed to such violence, it was no surprise that she became afraid of Rio.

Without building up a tolerance against violence, it was difficult to not be afraid.

This was something Rio understood, therefore he took the initiative to apologize.

To become estranged with her who was his cousin was not something Rio wished for.

She was not in the wrong for feeling that way.

Despite being frightened by Rio, Ruri still worried about him.

Although it was a shame, there was no use crying over spilt milk. Working to restore their relationship was the only way forward.

Those were Rio's thoughts.

「It's not her fault you know.」

That was why Rio had no intention on criticizing her behaviour.

「...I thought you'd say so.」

Perhaps having already anticipated his words, Yuba responded with a wry smile.

It was an expression of relief but at the same time, tinged with a hint of loneliness.

It was the look of a parent witnessing their child becoming independent.

Suddenly, Yuba was overwhelmed with the feeling of wanting to act like a proper grandmother in front of her overly benevolent grandchild.

It was a perplexing feeling.

Whether the solution to her earlier worries was solved was unknown.

Far from offering any support, all she was able to say were a few trivial words to Rio.

(I'm such a useless grandmother, aren't I...?)

Yuba now felt confident about disclosing the truth to her reliable grandchild. However, at the same time, she felt ashamed and sighed deeply in her heart.

TRANSLATOR : Cnine

EDITOR : Vrryou

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PART 1

The day for the village's trade group to leave for the capital had arrived.

It was still early in the morning when the villagers and those leaving for the capital gathered in the village square.

Around ten carriages with goods were idly standing by. Among the village's own surplus was also the goods handed over from Gon's village.

Including Rio, there was a rather large group of 15 people headed towards the capital.

Rarely was anybody armed with weapons and armour in the village. However, today, everybody, including Rio, was fully equipped.

「Rio.」

After a final inspection of the cargo, Ruri called out to the bored Rio in a slightly strained voice.

Yuba stood up so as to watch her from the rear.

Rio directed an amiable smile towards them.

「Ruri-san, Yuba-san. I'll be going.」

He bid farewell to the two of them in a calm voice.

「Yeah. Be careful.」

「Likewise, please be sure to take care of yourself.」

「Got it.」

Both of them returned his smile and bid him farewell to which Rio responded firmly.

「Then... Uhm...」

Seemingly wanting to say something, Ruri stuttered out a few words, troubled at how to formulate her words.

She floated a difficult expression which Rio quickly noticed.

「What's the matter?」

「Yeah... Uhm... I'm sorry!」

At Rio's question, Ruri vigorously bowed her head deeply.

Rio became evidently taken aback.

However, he immediately realised what she was apologizing for.

It was probably related to what Yuba spoke to him about a couple days ago.

「I've done something terrible to Rio, have I not? Even though Rio saved me, I still became afraid of you...」

Overcome with regret, Ruri apologized to Rio in a dispirited voice.

She kept her shoulders straight, displaying her resolve.

「There's no need to apologize since it was the result of myself losing control over my emotions. It's not Ruri-san's fault.」

Rio responded to her with a slightly troubled smile.

「B— But...」

Rio made an apologetic expression, seeing Ruri still wanting to apologise.

「Even then, Ruri-san was still worried about me. So, I'm the one at fault.」

Rio gave a slow, unadorned explanation.

Since he had made her afraid, Rio avoided unnecessary interactions with Ruri, fearing that he would only frighten her further if he actively tried to close the distance

Even so, Ruri worried for Rio's emotional instability and regularly approached him despite being afraid.

In other words, they were both concerned about the other's well being and ended up only making the situation worse.

Rio reflected on the choices he made.

He made somebody else worry about him. To prevent something like that from happening, he should have communicated more since the beginning.

Human relationships are complicated; doing what one thinks would be best might actually produce the opposite results.

Rio sighed inwardly, acknowledging that he was still inexperienced when it came to social issues.

「That's wrong! Rio isn't the one in the wrong here! This is situation where I should be thanking you. I was wrong in getting scared of Rio, so please, allow me to apologize. I am truly sorry!」

Rio denied that she had done anything wrong but Ruri relentlessly apologized.

「No, it's the result of my own lack of consideration. Even if I saved you, I went about it wrongly.」

「Th— That's not it! I'm the one at fault.」 [TL : Honestly, when will they end this infinite loop of apologizing]

「No, it's only natural that Ruri-san became afraid and I was the cause.」

「Like I said! Rio isn't in the wrong! I am!」

Stuck in an apology deadlock, Ruri's voice became heated.

「But...」

「It's alright! I'm the wrong one here!」

Ruri flatly cut Rio off before he could deny her fault and asserted that she was to blame.

Understanding that she would not back down, Rio blinks for a moment.

「I understand... Then we're both at fault. How about that?」

Watching the obstinate Ruri, Rio made a proposed as such with a bitter smile.

Rio believed that he was the one to blame since he let his emotions overtake him, rampaging and frightening Ruri.

Ruri believed that although Rio saved her, rather than being thankful, she became afraid of her saviour.

They were both worried about each other but neither took the initiative to discuss their feelings.

It was rather unfortunate.

If that was the case, a compromise would be favourable.

「No— ...yeah. That's right... isn't it?」

For a moment, Ruri was about to refute Rio's suggestion, but perhaps having understood his intentions, she finally backed down.

Although there were still traces of dissatisfaction in her eyes, her mouth formed a gentle smile.

Rio also softly smiled back at her.

It warmed Rio's heart for him to get a glimpse of her sincerity through her reaction.

While conceding to Ruri inwardly, Rio shyly presented his hand.

「Shall we shake hands as a sign of reconciliation?」

For an instant, Ruri stood there absentmindedly, but when she noticed at his outstretched hand, she grasped it with a slightly surprised expression.

「Yeah! Sorry, I'm sorry, Rio...」

With tears flowing down her cheeks, Ruri firmly grasped Rio's hand.

Part 2

「Me, as well... Let's speak again when I return. I'll be off then.」

「Yeah, it's a promise!」

Ruri showed a bright smile as she eagerly affirmed Rio's proposal.

Seeing the state of the two of them, Yuba directed a warm smile at them from the back.

「Yuba-san, I'll be off. I'll be sure to protect the goods during transit, so no need to be worried.」

Feeling Yuba's gaze upon him, Rio became slightly embarrassed. He quickly pushed the feeling aside however and spoke in a serious demeanour.

「Yeah, please. But, please remember that your life is much more important.」

「That's right. Rio, be careful, okay?」

「Got it.」

To have a family truly worrying about him, happiness bloomed within him as he answered with a peaceful smile.

With the three having finished their conversation which erected a difficult to impede barrier around them—「Uh— Uhm! Best regards, Rio-sama!」

Sayo, who was timidly watching them from afar, finally gathered her courage to speak up to Rio.

Although she usually wore typical village attire, she was dressed for the road today.

As one could have guessed, she was amongst one those who would be heading towards the capital as well.

Originally, Ruri was to go, but the incident from a few days ago resulted in a change of plans.

Yuba forbid Ruri from participating, resulting in Sayo, who had never been to the capital before, to participate as a substitute.

「Of course. My best regards to you as well.」

Rio returned her greeting in a calm manner.

Yuba and Ruri watched the tensed Sayo with heartwarming eyes.

「Y— Yes! Although it may be a hassle to Rio-sama, please take care of Onii-chan as well.」

「Yes, I'll try my best to keep everybody safe during our journey, but please follow my orders during an emergency.」

「Sayo-chan, be careful, okay?」

In preparation for the worst case scenario, Sayo was told to obey every order without question.

「Yes!」

At his words, Sayo responded firmly.

「Oi, Sayo. What an unnecessary thing to say. I can protect myself, you know.」

Perhaps having overheard their exchange, Shin forced his way into the conversation with a displeased look.

Rio widened his eyes slightly.

Although he was a bit annoyed, it was rare for Shin to ever approach Rio.

What could have possibly changed his attitude?

「Onii-chan, it's no good to pick a fight with Rio-sama, you know.」

As if chiding a rowdy child, Sayo reprimanded Shin in a slightly strict tone.

Shin was Sayo's elder brother.

The naughty Shin and the modest Sayo. Despite their contrasting personalities, Sayo still spoke her mind to Shin.

「Wh— Why would I be picking a fight with that guy?」

Despite trying to put on an air, his voice sounded hollow.

「Geez, Onii-chan, didn't you just say that other day that you recognize Rio-sama because he saved Ruri-san? You can't act like an irritable child forever.」

「I— Idiot! Don't say something like that!」

Shin reacted in a fluster at Sayo who exposed his inner thoughts.

Rio and Ruri watched the two in mild surprise.

「Hm— Hmph, I'm grateful that you protected Ruri. You did well.」

Glaring at Rio with a slightly flushed face, Shin kept on talking.

Rio and Ruri smiled in amusement at his childish behaviour.

「Thank you very much.」

「I wish you've been this obedient since the beginning. Truly, such a child.」

Despite still possessing a sharp tongue, he seemed to have accepted Rio one way or another.

Having been teased by Ruri, Shin turned the other way.

「Th— That's not it. I can take care of myself so if something happens, please protect Sayo.」

With those curt words, Shin turned around and left them.

When judged by a third party, it was obvious that he was trying to hide his embarrassment.

「I'm sorry. My brother isn't honest about his feelings.」

Sayo apologized to Rio. At a glance, it would seem that Sayo was the elder sister and Shin was the younger brother.

「There are a lot of men who share his social awkwardness. Although he might act like that, it isn't an accurate reflection of his feelings. Having that sort of attitude doesn't mean he's a bad person」

「Yeah... Th— Thank you.」

Exhibiting slight surprise at Rio's words, Sayo awkwardly thanked him.

There were many cases in which Shin's behaviour made him easily misunderstood.

It was a childish side of him.

Therefore, although he frequently quarrels with other villagers, Shin was still the looked up to by many young men in the village.

Still, Sayo grieved over the fact that he could not get along with Rio despite being close with the village's young men.

Continuously thinking of ways to improve the situation, she kept talking about Rio with Shin, though it never brought a favourable reaction. [TL : OF COURSE IT IS]

However, when Rio saved Ruri the other day, Shin finally made a remark of acceptance.

Perhaps the two would finally be on good terms after this.

She had planned on trying to have Rio understand Shin's clumsy personality, but Rio easily saw through Shin's outer behaviour before she had the chance.

She felt both surprised and glad, envying the mutual understanding between men.

「Yosh, we'll be departing soon~」

Acting as the trade group's leader, Dora's voice resounded throughout the area.

It seemed the time for departure was nearing.

Part 3

「It's about time, isn't it? Let's get on the carriage. I'll be going, Ruri-san, Yuba-san.」

「Yeah, take care!」

「Take care.」

Bidding farewell once more, Rio approached one of the wagons and took the coachman's seat.

「I'll be in your care, Dora-san.」

「Ou! Likewise.」

Rio greeted Dora who was sitting beside him on the wagon.

Dora returned his greeting with his usual good-natured smile.

Rio's role in the trade group was to protect the villagers and their goods.

Rio looked back into the canopy of the wagon.

When his eyes met with the person sitting in there, he received a scowl and a glare of unrivalled hatred.

Indeed, the one sitting there was Gon, who would soon be convicted as a crime slave.

「Ha. Just seeing your face makes me pissed off! If only I could kill you right now!」

Catching sight of Rio's face, Gon hurled out insults and threats.

He continued glaring daggers at Rio.

With his entire body bounded by ropes, even with his huge build, he could not break free. The only unchanging thing was his brashness.

Rio let out a small sigh.

It seemed like he was still lively enough/

「Oh shut up. Yosh, I guess it's time to depart. Let's go!」

Barking back at Gon inside the wagon, Dora signalled the group's departure.

The sky was still dim as the sun began creeping over the horizon.

Even though it was still fall, the whiteness of their breath could be seen as the group endured the biting morning chill.

Being seen off by the villagers, the trade group started their journey towards the capital.

「Take care~!」

The voices of the villagers could be heard in the distance.

The ones on the rear wagons were still waving their hands.

Rio rode on the lead wagon.

The highway towards the capital connected the villages to one another. It was regularly serviced to support carriage traffic and was wide enough for two carriages to travel side-by-side.

However, without a high quality carriage, the riding experience was uncomfortable at best due to the unpaved roads.

The time it would take for a carriage, travelling from the village to the capital, would take exactly one day.

Although it is not too far, it is not close either.

So that he would not suffer from a sore backside, Rio spread a blanket to sit on.

「You pride yourself as a man, yet you hate so much as to thoroughly trash me. You're no different than a tyrant.」

Hateful words came from the back of the wagon.

Gon continuously hurled abuse at Rio.

The contents contained only mockery and ridicule.

Despite trying to get a reaction from Rio, he was only met with silence.

He would achieve his goal if Rio hits him again but his provocations simply went through one ear and out the other.

Even if Rio felt that Gon's tantrum was pitiful, he did not feel any anger.

「Oi, listen to me! I lived, doing whatever I pleased but you're also the same as me! We're no different from each other!」

Seeing Rio ignore every single he said, anger welled up within Gon.

His voice started to gradually become louder.

It was good that Gon was this lively.

At least, it would be good if he kept it up until they could sell him as a crime slave.

They needed him alive, otherwise they would be unable to receive the reparation payment for Ruri.

Even if he does not last long as crime slave, Rio was not interested about his fate.

「You know what my great self* hates the most? People like you, who put on a good face but are full of filthy desires.」 [ED*: He refers to himself as "ore-sama"] [TL : Typical of puny villain right?]

Rio felt an odd admiration for Gon who was able to keep spouting insults ever since the journey started.

He can shout and scream as much as he wants but his voice was becoming a bit too loud.

It would be bothersome if he kept shouting for the entire journey as well.

With that thought, Rio approached Gon.

「Aah? What?」

Seeing Rio slowly approaching with his hand raised, Gon floated a dubious expression.

Carrying an annoyed expression, Rio could only see Gon as a noisy dog who would not stop barking.

Gon had complained loudly in order to get Rio riled up, but he only served to be a minor annoyance.

(What a joke!)

Rio was the first person to ever make a fool out of Gon.

Up until the incident, Gon had been constantly surrounded by his followers or those he feared him.

There were the rare few who were openly hostile to him, but he quickly made them yield through sheer force.

However, Rio was indifferent towards Gon.

He detested that.

He could not help but detest him.

Rio crushed his pride and beat the living hell out of him. Although Gon intended on ridiculing Rio as also harbouring filth, he felt like he was already seen through.

「Sleep for a bit.」

Saying that, Rio invoked Spirit Arts and put Gon to sleep.

Resistance was possible if one excelled at Odo control but for Gon, it was impossible since he could not wield Spirit Arts.

Gon fell asleep in an instant.

「Ooh that's amazing. So that's Spirit Arts, huh?」

Dora spoke in admiration at the scene of Gon falling asleep in a blink of an eye.

「Yeah. He'll be quiet with this.」

Finally regaining their peace and quiet, Rio gave a wry smile as he spoke.

He put quite a bit of power into his Spirit Arts so Gon should stay asleep until they reach the capital.

Afterwards, chatter flowed from every wagon and a peaceful atmosphere hung in the air.

Despite the possibility of an attack by wild beasts or monsters, with the amount of people present in the trade group, as long as there were not a very

large number of aggressors, the risk was very low.

Furthermore, the villagers were armed with short swords and lances in case an attack occurred.

Even most bandits would be discouraged to attack such a large number of people.

Still, Rio would casually scan their surroundings for any suspicious activity.

If by any chance there was an ambush, he would notice and be able to cope with it immediately.

Several hours have passed since the trade group left the village and the sun shone overhead as the wagons continued rolling down the highway.

Under the clear blue sky, warm sunlight radiated over them.

Vast fields of green spread around them with mountains and forests visible in the distance.

Wrapped in the cool autumn breeze while surrounded by a picturesque landscape, Rio enjoyed the scenery as they moved along slowly.

Translator : Cnine

Editor :

Proofreader : SenjiQ

Part 1

In the evening of the day they left the village*, Rio's group arrived at capital of the Karasuki Kingdom. [TL : maybe it's a typo or another village close to capital, need to check the distance to capital from previous chapter]

The size was around 360,000 square meters, with a population around 300 thousand; its size easily became the biggest in the Yagumo region.

By the way, when compared to the Strahl region, it only reached a medium scale.

Its surroundings were surrounded with ramparts with guards at its gates.

With the exception of the people who live in the capital, one was a need to pay a toll for peddling.

They issued a certificate of tax payment when Dora paid the tax.

With that, they could freely go in and out of the capital for a certain interval.

Rio, taking along the restricted Gon, along with Shin and Dora entrusted the coach to the lodgings of the soldiers*. [TL : Why they didn't call it barracks instead?]

Meanwhile, the rest of the group would be staying in a simple lodging for the evening.

The lodging quarters were a simple lodging, oriented for groups, which were under the management of the kingdom.

Though it didn't come with dinner, you could save a considerable amount of money compared to staying in an inn with large number of people.

After promising to meet again later, they parted with the other villagers, lead by Dora, going towards the lodging house of the soldiers, bringing Gon along with Rio and Shin.

Various buildings stand in line inside the capital, the road wasn't too wide.

The humans walking on it were quite lively.

But, they were not in a situation where they could slowly enjoy the capital's atmosphere.

Gon and Shin started to throwing verbal insults to each other since some time ago.

With Shin snapping at each of those insults, even Gon was pleased as Shin fell into a vicious circle of insults.

After awakened from the sleeping spirit art, Gon, who knew he wouldn't be able to do anything to Rio, didn't say any abusive words toward Rio again.

Though he didn't know why he had that change of heart, his attitude towards Shin was the same as ever.

Rio was astounded at Gon's abusive language.

He couldn't even measure what he would be in the future.

With Gon's remaining life, after becoming a crime slave, it was unknown how many years he'd have left.

And despite that, he didn't stop himself from gloating with the self-satisfaction of harming others.

Maybe it was just his optimism of his own situation, or else he just become defiant.

In any case it was befitting of his shameless nerves.

(Well, whatever is okay)

He was certainly unable to forgive Gon who tried to harm Ruri, who was his own relative.

But, that man, who was doomed to die in the not too distant future, didn't even show any sign of correcting his attitude.

Though he might be able to live carelessly if he did not receive any punishment, it was already too late as he was surely going to get his punishment, so Rio isn't interested in Gon anymore.

「Heh, Ruri's soft skin is truly superb. Shin, I guess you're never even touched her skin, right? 」

Gon said those words; maybe he thought he could incite Shin with jealousy.

That was a cheap provocation.

「What! ? 」

But, the young men called Shin taking on that provocation.

Though Rio knew that he didn't give a shit about Gon's action, Shin, as usual, his expression changed and he fell into Gon's trap.

「Fuhn, What. You're also fallen in love with her, right? I'm really disappointed. I originally want to rape her only to dumped her afterward, Hahaha! 」

Being even more pleased with Shin's reaction, Gon let out a broken laugh with proud expression on his face.

「You, bastard 」

Shin was enveloped by a dangerous aura, as he glared at Gon.

With a feeling of displeasure enveloping him, it wouldn't be strange if he hit Gon soon.

Their quarrel gathered quite a lot of attention from their surroundings.

Along with Rio unusual attire, foreign to that kingdom, leading Gon, who was bound by rope, they gathered quite a spectacle.

Sensing many lines of sight, from their surroundings, Rio sighed a little.

Though he didn't know what was in Dora's mind, they kept advancing to their destination.

「Geez, what the hell you lot talking about?. See, we've arrived」

Just when Rio began to think about whether to give a warning, Dora told them that they had arrived at their destination, with an astonished face, looking at the two people quarelling.

Their current location was near the heart of the capital, the royal palace.

In that place, there was a very noticeably large building.

It seemed that was where the soldier's lodgings were.

「We'll enter now. Follow me」

「Cheh ! 」

Rio entered that building while pulling along the rope fixed to Gon's neck.

When his eyes met with Rio's sidelong gaze, who was looking with cool gaze, Gon clicked his tongue and then turned his gaze away.

「What's your bussiness ? 」

When entering that building, a soldier inquired at Rio's group.

「We brought a criminal who attempted to rape. The three of us are the witness, and the criminal is that guy. The chief of tax collection staff, Saga Hayate-sama said that he would also become the witness」

Dora explained their bussiness in few sentences with a calm tone.

When he said Hayate's name, the change in that soldier expression was pretty much noticeable.

「I see. If Saga-sama said that he'd become the witness, that incident must be true. May I inquire into the matter too? 」

「Of course」

Following the soldier, the four of them were taken into the interrogation room.

In that room they talked about Gon rape attempt.

「No way, to think that there really was an idiot who tried to commit a crime of creeping into a house where Saga-sama was staying 」

To that foolhardiness, the soldier looked at Gon with shocked expression.

Though there was a need to ask Hayate to ascertain the credibility of that story, he knew that a false charge against another person by fabricating a story, and by saying that the tax officer was the witness, it would become a serious felony once exposed.

It seemed that the soldier decided to believe their story.

「For the time being, it seems I need to confirm the truth from Saga-sama,

even if that person would show some retaliation, let's treat him as guilty in this place*. We need to check regarding how much we'll buy him for. Please wait for a while」

「Acknowledged」

He placed a collar on Gon's neck with fluid movement and, the soldier left to another room while taking along Gon with him.

Though he was still trying to spit on Rio's face before he left, Rio easily warded that by forming an invisible wind barrier, with spirit arts, to protect himself.

Part 2

「Fu*k ! I hate those eyes which looking down on humans! 」

As if showing his last resistants, Gon shouted with the outburst of his emotions at Rio.

「Don't look at me with those annoying eyes ! 」

「Oy, SHUT UP ! 」

「GA!」

The soldier hit Gon's head, who was shouting loudly, with the hilt of his sword.

Gon's balance was fairly disturbed as his head took a considerably strong bashing.

「God Daaamn iiitttt.....」

Gon muttered in a low voice while hanging his head down, as if he was completely frustated.

Those were the last words they heard from Gon. [TL : Sayonara Gon]

「Let's go」

Roped with a rough rope, Gon, who was being dragged by the soldier, walked with unsteady steps.

Silence descended in the room after that soldier and Gon were gone.

「Well, he's young, has a good physique, and healthy. He'll definitely be purchased with those points alone」

As if destroying that tedious atmosphere, Dora's voice clearly resounded in that room.

「..... If you say so, it should be okay」

Sighing a little, Rio decided to follow the conversation while smiling wryly.

「Damn it, that bastard, I won't feel refreshed unless he's sold even little bit

higher! 」

But, Shin was the only one who still held a grudge towards Gon, even till now. He was shouting loudly, as if helplessly trying to vent his anger.

「Well, the fact is that he's already become a crime slave. He won't meet a satisfying end. Furthermore, we even get consolation money from his village. Though I understand your feelings, let's just leave it as it is. It'll only make you tired on your own」

As a senior in life, Dora had some resistance to that kind of situation.

He knew how to ward the stress.

Though his foul mood was somewhat restrained with those words, Shin was still feeling discontent for the whole time.

And then, the soldier from before come back to the room around 30 minutes later.

「This is the money paid after that guy was sold. Thank god his price set a new record. He sold for 10 gold coin」

1 gold was an amount of money which enable someone to live and play around all day long, even without working, for a whole month in Imperial city.

Also, 10 gold was the amount of money which was enough for an average family to live in the capital for one year.

Though it was not that strange, that selling price was several times that of a normal slave. A crime slave was treated as a consumable goods forever, thus it was cheaper in the long run.

By the way, the price of a crime slave was decided by confirming the condition, according a manual, to get a grade, and then determining the price from the predetermined grade.

「Thank you very much. Let's go」

After carefully took the important 10 gold coins, Dora left the lodging house along with Shin and Rio.

「Since it's already dark, I think we should immediately go back to the lodging」

Said Dora, who was leading the way as the only one who knew about the roads inside the royal capital.

Rio and Shin followed behind him.

After walking for around 20 minutes, they finally entered the densely packed lodging facility area.

Inns weren't the only ones there, there were also simple lodgings in there.

「Oh, looks like that's the place」

Said Dora, who found the villager that was currently on a stand by the outside the lodging.

Though there were several simple lodging houses erected in this area, they couldn't be used unless for a party with member exceeding certain number.

Some of the buildings were nothing but just a room which served as simple kitchen* and bedroom; on the other hand, it was possible for 30 people to sleep with just one room. [TL* : [Sunken hearth](#)]

「Are you hungry? Wait a minute, today we'll eat outside with everyone. You two drop your luggage and meet later」

It seemed they were waiting outside the lodging, waiting for Rio and co to come back.

Though they could use one simple lodging for one party, some people might come to steal something.

That was the duties of the watchmen.

「Ou. Thank's for the hard work. Then how about we go eat Kamu tan
「Seriously ? Yaaay! 」

When Dora said the name of the dish for Rio and Shin to hear, Shin raised his voice in delight, as if he had forgotten about his foul mood that had haunted him until then.

Dora smiled wryly, looking at Shin's response.

「Kamu tan ? 」

「Ah, is this the first time you've eat Kamu tan? Though it can't be easily made

in the village, it's a traditional dish of this region. It's made by boiling the ingredients, made of processed thin wheat, and we eaten with soup」 [TL : Sound like noodle]

「Hee, that sound delicious」

Though he had never even heard of the dishe called Kamu tan, he could somehow imagine what kind of dish it was.

After dropping his luggage and entering the lodging as it is, the three of them goes to eat that Kamu tan.

「How about that store?」

「Where ever is fine. Let's enter it quickly! 」

Since they really didn't know where a shop that was serving delicious meals, Rio decided to following Dora.

Though Shin also didn't know the shop's details, as this was his second time coming to the royal capital, Kamu tan was his favourite dish.

Rio and Dora smiled wryly, deciding to follow after Shin, who was hastily entering the store.

The business was prospering inside the store, the guests were also slurping noodles dishes using chopsticks.

Rio who had already predicted such a spectacle wasn't shocked that much.

Though he didn't know which was the recommended menu, he decided to leave it to Dora.

「Kamu tan for three please. Large serving and Please add meat toppings too」

「Roger ! 」

While waiting their dish to be served, he trying to ask about the characteristics of Kamu tan from Dora and Shin.

The answer for that was, RAMEN.

In addition, there was also some dishes that resembled Soba and udon.

Though both of that names were different from on earth.

Since it was a dish they'd eaten since olden days, it became the local cuisine of the region, just like the pasta he previously saw in Strahl region, it seemed the possibility that the creator of this dish was a reincarnator was low. [TL : I saw the foreshadowing for something like 200 chapter later]

「Hai, three Kamu tan are done!」

Soon, the shop assistant brought Kamu tan in porcelain bowls.

Containing wavy noodles was transparent shouyu* base soup; it gave rise to a steamy and rich fragrant aroma. [TL* : Soy Sauce] [PR: here's the cooking LN we all know]

The meat topping covered a large surface of the noodles, though it was a little different from chashu*, it was not what was important, as it was already delicious as it was. [TL* : Roasted pork fillet, [reference please](#)]

「You must make a slurping sound while eating Kamu tan」

After explaining to Rio with a triumphant face, Shin vigorously slurped the Kamu tan.

Since Rio was originally Japanese, he wasn't repulsed by the habit of eating while slurping. Whether it was in Strahl or Yagumo regions, eating while slurping was a bad habit which was a breach of a manners, regardless of class.

But, in the Yagumo region, this Kamu tan was the only exception, where one could eat while making a slurping sound as a common exception.

Rio followed their example and ate the Kamu tan with experienced movements.

The soup was a very simple soup, without any condiment mixed in it.

The flavour was a little different from standard Japanese ramen and he preferred a more profound and rich taste as a young Japanese.

But, Rio's chest fired up with passion as he finally ate ramen after a long time.

While slowly savouring the taste, Rio satisfied his hunger with a little rise in his mood.

Translator[Vanguard] : Cnine

Editor[Middle Guard] :

Proofreader[Magician] : SenjiQ

Part 1

The next day after they arrived at the royal capital, under the dazzling blue sky, Rio was walking in the downtown area of the royal capital, along with Sayo.

They were asked to purchase luxury goods by the villagers, while the other villagers were going to sell trade goods, both of them were going to buy large amounts of daily necessities for the village.

「As expected of royal capital, there are so many people here, right」

Having come to the royal capital for the first time it somehow left a deep impression on her, thus Sayo voiced her admiration.

To Sayo's words, Rio too looked at the scenery of the royal capital, that was spread before him.

This is also the first time Rio arrived at the royal capital of the kingdom.

There were many wooden buildings and houses covered with mortar in the Karasuki kingdom; the buildings that stood in rows were somehow exuding a similar atmosphere to that of oriental architecture. [TL : Japanese traditional house]

As both were some sort of country bumpkins, they hardly knew where the stores that sold luxury goods were.

Though they were asking the other villagers whether it was fine for them to shop alone, they just said that it was due to insufficient personnel and Rio being able to do the calculations.

Thus it came to the situation where he's shopping along with Sayo, though he was a little unsatisfied with the other reason.

They were walking in a business district, as they were going around many shop, without finding the goods they wanted.

Their purpose on the first day was to sightsee the royal capital along with shopping; they were going around to various shop at a slow pace.

「Sayo-san, this is really the first time you've left the village, right ? 」

「Yes. I always wanted to go to this place, ever since I heard various stories about royal capital from oniichan who went to this place once before」

「That wish finally come true, right」

「Yes! This is really just like a dream ! Furthermore, I can even go sightseeing like this」

「That's right, since it's our first time coming to royal capital, it must be due to everyone's consideration right」 [TL : Duh]

「Ye-Yeah. I think so」

She somehow stuttered at the end, even her face was blushing a little.

Though Rio was paying attention so that he wouldn't be overwhelmed by the ordinary surroundings, so there was no way he would notice her state.

「E-Even so, viewing the royal capital from below is really amazing, right ! 」

Said Sayo with a somehow flustered voice.

「That's right. Though I visited many countries in my journey, I've never seen a castle of that scale」

The capital of Karasuki kingdom was build as if to surround a small hill, at the center of that was the royal castle, on top of the hill.

Looking at the royal castle, by looking up from the urban area was surely the best part.

And then, walking around the whole town while enjoying that scenery—.

「Oy, the two young bird over there, are you in the middle of a date ? 」

Then they were being called out to by a female shopkeeper that was managing her stall.

It seemed she was selling small accessories which were geared toward women.

「Ah, no, we're.....」

Her face was blushing on hearing the female shopkeeper, and flustered when she answered.

「We came to royal capital from our village, and currently shopping while doing the usual trade」

Just before her train of thought short circuited, Rio replaced Sayo, who was stuttering with her words, to explaining their circumstances.

「Ara, is that so ? Hee」

Said the female shopkeeper, who was turning her line of sight to Sayo, who's curling herself with flushed face.

To her line of sight, that was seemingly seeing through her, Sayo blushing even more.

「Onii-san, since it's the long awaited coming to royal capital, how about buying something for the girl as a celebration ? 」

“Grin”, and along with her bussiness smile, she made a suggestion to buy an item.

Though he knew that it would come to business talk from the very beginning, it was not the kind talk that could be easily refused.

If he refusing her here, it would made the others think that Rio is a bit to oblivious to the atmosphere. [PR: He isn't?] [TL : Yeah unfortunately he isn't]

「.....Ah, You're right. Sayo-san. Is there something you want? 」

Smiling wryly, Rio asked Sayo.

Rio had enough travelling expenses to use, even in this country.

Buying one present for Sayo wouldn't even put a dent in his pocket.

Since he also felt awkward refusing a call in that situation, Rio could only hop on board the sales talk of the female shopkeeper.

「Fuee ! ? I-I don't need that! 」

As if be confused, Sayo was trying to refuse Rio's offer.

Rio laughed amusingly at her, who was pushing both of her hands in front of her and making an over reaction, by vigorously shaking her neck to left and right.

「It's alright, there's no need to hold yourself back」

「That's right ! After great troubles in making a man say that he'll buy a gift, here you must show your manners by choosing the present carefully, as a girl.」

When Rio gave an ok for Ruri to not hold herself, the female shopkeeper took advantage of that.

「As she says, feel free」

「Eh Ah, The-Then」

Being urged by those two, even while bewildered, Sayo looked at the items that were being displayed.

Though she seemed to be timid at first, Sayo instantly showed a serious expression.

Rio was waiting silently as she stared intently at the items, while hearing the female shopkeeper explanation.

Finally Sayo picked a beautiful hairpin in the form of a flower.

「Haha. You have a keen eyes. You have a nice sense. This is the best item」

「Erm, is it expensive ? 」

Sayo asked that as if being reserved.

「Nn~, How about 60 copper ? 」

It doesn't mean that it was expensive to the point that it was unreachable, even for a general commoner, but living in the village, that was considerably expensive for Sayo, who had never held even a scrap of money.

「Is this to your fancy ? Sayo-san」

「Eh, Ah, but.....」

Rio confirmed Sayo's choice in a way that wouldn't made her get worked up.

But, Sayo was looking alternately between Rio and the hairpin with a bewildered expression.

「Onee-san. Give me that please」

「E? 」

After looking at Sayo's state, he knew that Sayo wanted that, so Rio told the female shopkeeper that he wanted to buy the hairpin.

Sayo was befuddled when she looked at Rio, who was giving one silver coin to the female shopkeeper.

「Thank you for your patronage ! Not haggling when buying a present for a girl will give you a favourable impression, you know! 」

Hearing that they came from a village, though the female shopkeeper somehow predicted that they would be bargaining a bit more, she was dumbfounded when Rio readily handed over the money.

Then, the female shopkeeper showed a full blown business smile as she receiving the silver coin and handed back the 40 copper coins.

When Rio receiving that, the female shopkeeper approached Sayo carrying the hairpin.

「Well then, here it is, will you put it on immediately ? 」

「Eh, Ah, Yes」

Thus, the female shopkeeper put the hairpin on Sayo with trained movements.

Sayo accepted that in a dreamy state.

The pink coloured flower hairpin was shining brightly in contrast with Sayo's white skin and her shoulder length black hair, that was stretching to her shoulders.



「あ、ありがとうございます！
リオ様、本当に」

リオは簪の代金を支払ってしまった。
サヨの様子からこの簪が気に入っている
ことは明らかだったので、確認は取れたと
機先を制したのだ。サヨの性格上、
断るであろうことは予想できたから。
サヨはようやく我に返ってきたのか、
へこへここと勢いよくリオに頭を下げだした。

Part 2

「That really suits you ! 」

「Yeah, it's lovely」

「T-Thank you very much ! 」

The female shopkeeper told her impression while smiling sociably.

Rio added his impression too and Sayo said her gratitude with a blushing red face.

「You must do your best, you know. Because there'll be high competition for this boy」

The female shopkeeper whispered so that only Sayo could hear it and winking lightly to her.

「Uu~~」

Sayo lowered her head to her body on hearing those words.

「Then, should we go again? Sayo-san」

「Y-Yeah ! 」

「I'll be waiting for your next patronage~ ! 」

The two of them then left to continuing their shopping.

The female shopkeeper said that to the back's of them, who were leaving.

By the way, after walking for a while, Sayo said 「Thank you very much!」 while smiling ear to ear and bowing vigorously at Rio; She looked at it pleasantly.

After that, they were wandering around the royal capital for a while, and they were returning to the public lodging.

And then, the sharp villagers found the hairpin that was put in Sayo hair, after many questions, Sayo told them with a flushed red face.

It seemed the trading group could sell all of the trading items; it was decided that they would go back to the village two days later.

Even after returning to the village, she would be always be questioned by the village women regarding the hairpin given by Rio, which Sayo always put in her hair.



Several days after they left the royal capital.

In the house of Saga, a high ranking samurai family, Saga Gouki, the current family head, was facing his own son, Hayate.

「A letter from Yuba-dono ? 」

Gouki asked that, in a low but powerful voice.

「Yes. Look like this is an important letter, as she wanted me to deliver this without fail」

「Uhm, I see Then, where's that letter? 」

「Here it is」

When Hayate took out the letter and delivered it, Gouki teared the seal in a polite manner, which was unsuited with his build.

Though it didn't mean that he was in a sullen mood, Gouki was someone who was strict and hard to please.

He's not someone who's easily agitated, and someone who have a bulky and massive build and minding about everything*. [TLC* : can't make sure about the last part >何事があっても動じず、どっしりと腰を構えて物事を見る人物だ。]

With his nickname, “Kishin Gouki[Gouki The Fierce God]”, which once made the soldiers of Rokuren, their neighbouring kingdom, tremble in fear.

That was Hayate's image of Gouki, Hayate and his siblings respected that kind of father.

Especially his younger by eight years sister, who made a declaration that she won't marry someone unless it was a man who was stronger than Gouki. [TL : Duh, another flag]

Even though they couldn't expect there to be a man who was stronger than Gouki in the kingdom.

Back to the topic, Gouki was staring intently at the letter with a somewhat gloomy expression.

「!!!!!! ? 」

But, just once, that Gouki let out a shocked expression, shown on his face.

Having guessed that expression, even Hayate was surprised by that.

(It must be something unusual for father to let it show on his face. Is it really that important information ?) [TL : Yeah it's the information about your Brother-in-law to be] [PR: couldn't disagree more; there's no way Rio would notice a blunt proposal made directly to his face]

Though he guessed that, he wouldn't ask his father, who was still in the middle of reading the letter.

Hayate just stared at Gouki, who was reading that letter intently.

Somehow Gouki's eyes were moving at an alarming speed, as if chasing after the sentences in that letter.

He was somehow showing a sad expression, then smiling as if being pleased by something.

Even after he finished reading it once, he read it again, so many times, as if he didn't want to miss anything in it.

「Please tell me detailed information about the boy called Rio」

After reading the letter so many times, Gouki asked about Rio, to confirm whether it was true or not.

Why was Rio's name suddenly popping in this place.

Gouki's voice was trembling.

Whether that was due to sorrow, joy, or delight.

Though Hayate was unable to grasp those facts, he decided to tell his father about Rio.

「Haa, he said that his age was around 14 years old. He's polite and has an extremely excellent personality; he's someone who's a cut above the rest, which I feel can't be found in an ordinary soldier」

「I see」

Gouki was grinning with fierce smile, as he was giving a full score to Rio's personality.

「I can't hold this any longer. I'll visit his majesty immediately. Hayate, you did a good job on bringing that letter to me. That surely was troublesome」

Gouki quickly rose from his seat after saying that.

「Ayame-sama has passed away, huh. Zen No, I must immediately notify his majesty about Rio-sama 」

When he left while muttering to himself, with various emotion in his chest, Gouki gallantly left the room.

Hayate just looking dumbfoundedly at the retreating figure of his father.

「What was that, that just happen.....」

Replaced the spirit tool called 「Warehouse of Space-Time」 to 「Item Box」.

Maybe will add the furigana soon.

Translator : Cnine

Editor :

Proofreader : SenjiQ

Part 1

A few day passed after Rio and co returned to the village from the royal capital.

Now that they greeted the last days of autumn, the village was celebrating it with a harvest festival.

Harvest festivals were an expression of gratitude for the abundant harvest in that year, and to wish for abundant harvests in the next year.

Though the daily lives of the villagers were always busy, only for that day, they were not working.

In the plaza, the villagers were gathering to dance a dance, sing a song, eat a meal, and drink sake in the daytime.

Since the kitchen in Yuba's house was the vastest in the village, every year, during that time, it was used by the gathering of the women who took pride in their cooking, in the village.

Even then, some of the women were moving quickly to do the preliminary preparations.

Rio's figure was also amongst them.

The kitchen was a woman's battlefield; though normally men couldn't enter the kitchen, as Rio's cooking ability was certified by Yuba and Ruri, they gave an exception for him.

Rio was cooking dishes that wasn't usually eaten in that region.

Sayo and Ruri were in his vicinity to learn the art of cooking from Rio.

Those dishes were apple pie and meat pie.

Since the pie batter* was already made, they were currently making the filling. [TL : I didn't use pie crust as it's the cooked version of pie batter while the kanji said that it's uncooked pie batter]

For the apple pie, they were using the winter apples gathered in the village, and using the village's cattle for the meat pie.

When thinking about how to make it easier for the villagers to cook apple pie later, it [winter apples] matched well with it, as sugar was a high-quality item and he didn't use butter, as they didn't know how to make it in that region.

By mixing a little bit of spice, gathered in this region, Rio cooked the winter apples till they become mushy.

「It smells really delicious. Rio really does know many different dishes」

「Yeah, it looks delicious. Rio-sama is amazing! 」

Ruri and Sayo were smiling widely, as their noses twitched, when they sniffed the faint amount of sweet aroma drifting in the room.

He then became embarrassed by such praise from the girls, and smiled as if trying to hide it, while continuing the cooking.

He placed the filling on top of the already laid pie batter, then enclosed it with another pie batter on top of it.

He then baked it in the pot.

As they had to also make the meat pies, proportional to the number of people, he couldn't take a break yet.

They stopped cooking two hours after that, and joined the festival, bringing along their dishes, including the ones made by Rio.

Thus it enhanced the atmosphere of the festival and brought it to completion.

Rio sat at the edge of the plaza, and was enjoying a conversation, with liquor in one hand, along with Dora and Ume.

Though it didn't cause out of place commotion, he was looking at the young men of the village who were happily dancing and singing, while he had his fill of the sake and meals.

「Nevertheless, it's almost 2 month since Rio came to this village. Time sure passes quickly, right?」

「It sure does. It already feels natural to see you in this village」

Though 2 month had yet to pass since he came to this village, for Dora and Ume, Rio already one of the villagers.

「I'm also really grateful that everyone is taking good care of me」

While deeply moved by their words, Rio smiled and said his gratitude to Dora and Ume.

「What, it's only natural you know. You see, you're already ——」

「O~y, Dora ! Come here for a while! 」

When Dora was about to say something, Someone called to him.

「Oops, I was just called. Well, actually we're the ones who's indebted to you. Not to mention about that water something. Well then, I'll be off for a while.」

With his bright smile trademark, Dora left that place with light gait.

「As he says, Rio. The livelihood in this village has improved little by little thanks to you, Rio. Not to mention about that aromatic water」

「Yes」

Rio smiled lightly, as to reply to Ume who said those words while looking at Dora's back.

「Nevertheless, when I think that Rio will leave this village sooner or later, I'll feel empty after that」

「That's Eh.....」

The matter of Rio leaving the village was already conveyed to the villagers from the very beginning.

Though he already met many people and went to many different places, when it came to the time to leave, it was when the atmosphere easily became solemn.

What kind of expression he should put on at that kind of time? Rio, who was still unable to find the right way to express it, just gave a vague smile.

「Furthermore amongst the young girls in this village, some of them have really fallen in love with you. It'll be a huge blow to those girls, right?」

「Eh, Er~m.....」

Rio was slightly dumbfounded and lost his words.

While grinning Ume sent a sidelong gaze to the dumbfounded Rio.

「Rio, there's someone you like, right?」

「Eh ? 」

Rio's dumbfounded state continued on hearing those words.

He was surprised that Ume guessed right, the secret he kept tightly in his heart.

「Your face's saying [How do you know that?], right. Well, let's just say that it's a woman's intuition」

「Woman's Intuition ? 」

Rio said that with a slightly puzzled tone.

There really are such things.

「Ha~h, Rio really is lacking in understanding a woman's heart in that way, huh」

Somehow guessing what Rio was thinking right then, Ume could only sigh in astonishment.

Rio smiled wryly as he was unable to retort Ume's words.

「I'm sure that those girls also somehow perceive that. They have no chance at victory from the very beginning. There's also the fact that Rio will leave the village sooner or later」

In rural places where the majority of them only did a simple chores was a difficult place for a woman to spend their whole life alone; they'd find a man who would support them for life from amongst the young men in the village.

They couldn't go after an ideal married life forever.

That was the only thing they must avoid at all cost.

Thus, a skill at sensing whether or not a man was interested in them was an indispensable for women.

They were looking at the reality .

If their love didn't come true, they'd stop pursuing it as soon as possible.

「That's why, even if they're excessively pampering you, no one's seriously pursuing you」

Ume's words went on.

「Still, since some of them generously welcoming wooing after you, that's just an appeal and nothing more」

「H-Ha~.....」 [TL : YEAH, TAKE THAT RIO; RIAJUU JUST EXPLODE!!!!]

Rio was bewildered while having a slightly cramped expression.

Somehow the village girls' love circumstances were more severe than what he expected.

「Well, though amongst them, some just can't suppress their feeling 」

Ume said that, as if adding one thing after another, while letting out a lonely smile.

Noticing that change in her expression, Rio expression become serious again.

「I think you already noticed Sayo's feelings, right ? 」

And Ume suddenly mentioned a name, without any hesitation.

「EH? Erm, no, we 」

Even while showing a bewildered expression, Rio still replied shortly.

With the other village girls only displaying an attitude as if they were interested in him, Sayo was the only one who looked like she wanted to tell Rio about her feeling so many times*. [TLC* : 他の村の少女達が気があるのかなと思わせるくらいの素振りしか見せてこない中で、サヨだけはリオに真っ直ぐと気持ちを伝えるような行動に出ることが多い。]

Though the person herself desperately tried to hide her feelings, she was unable to hide it skillfully, like the other girls.

Thus, as expected, even Rio had slightly noticed her feelings.

Though he was unable to understand why she thought that way.

Part 2

「That girl received a very important present from you」

Ume referenced the present he gave to Sayo a few days ago.

That was right, a few days ago when they were touring around the royal capital, he presented a hairpin to Sayo.

If it was the usual Rio, he wouldn't do such an action that would cause the thoughtless misunderstanding that he fancied the other party.

But, only at that time, due to the sales talk of the female shopkeeper, who was skillfully controlling the atmosphere, which cause him make an exceptional behaviour.

Though Rio himself wasn't thinking too deeply about such an action, could he really not buy a present without reading the atmosphere?.

That was what he thought.

「It's not like I'll blame you for giving a present to that girl. Saying that kind of thing is like denying the relationships between humans*. I won't be mad if you're not toying with her feelings」

「.....」

Rio was speechless when he heard what Ume just said.

「But, that girl is a bit too pure, right. After her parents passed away too early, she lived with her only brother. Since Shin is overprotective, that might be a misfortune for Sayo, as her mentality is a little immature*」 [TL : Age ranking from older to younger is, Shin>Ruri>Rio and Sayo]

With that said, the side of being realistic regarding the marriage, and the philosophy of love between man and woman, was something that was originally taught by parents to their child.

Sayo, whose mother passed away, didn't have anyone to teach that. She was taught by the adult women in her surroundings but, she hesitated to asked further with her brother Shin by her side.

The result of that was Sayo became a pure hearted girl who never even once had the slightest touch of love between men and women.

Thus, one day she just fell in love at the first sight of Rio, who came from another place, and still continued with her feelings.

「Spare that girl and don't toy around with her feelings. I know that you won't do something like that to that girl though, somehow I become too medlesome with your affair」

Ume said that while smiling wryly.

「Well, if you're thinking of continuing to live in this village, dating that girl is extremely welcome. Though you'll be receive the usual abusive language, even Shin won't reject it. Or rather, it won't be strange if he's actually assisting Sayo from behind」

Rio responded with a vague smile to her words.

Rio would leave the village sooner or later.

That was an absolute fact that would never change.

That was why, in that village there was no future where Rio lived together with Sayo.

[Maybe it's better to tell her that fact soon.]

When he was just about to say what he thought indirectly, at that time ——.

(! ?)

Rio felt that there were a few people that somehow entered the magical barrier of the village.

Their number was ten.

They had no intention of hiding their presence, nor did he feel hostility from them.

There were no villagers left in the village.

In that case, they were outsiders.

「..... excuse me. I'll leave you for a while」

Rio rose from his seat and apologizes to Ume.

Ume didn't hold him back when he seemingly went to pick a flower*. [TL : You know, peeing. please remember that the author is female]

Rio was walking in the direction that people entered the village from.

In that place were 10 people.

Looking at their movements, each one of them wasn't an ordinary one. [TL : They're power rangers]

Especially the two at the lead, who wore expensive clothing; he knew their ability towered above the rest.

His weapon was inside the item box*. [TL : Previously known as "Storage of Space and Time"]

There would be some time lag when he picked it up.

Though he couldn't feel hostile intent from the other side, it was better than being sorry.

「Could you tell me your bussiness in this village ? 」

Somehow even his opponent noticed that Rio wasn't an ordinary person too which made them a little restless.

But, the only two at the front gave a little different reaction.

The elderly person whose appearance was completely like a boulder[robust], the female who was around that man's age too, with a calm and collected air was staring intently at Rio and their body was shivering.

「C-Could it be Rio-sama? You're Rio-sama right ? 」

「Eh, AH, yeah 」

He was truly shocked when a strange old man suddenly called his name with "-Sama" attached to it while looking dumbfoundedly at him.

「OOH ! As I thought! 」

And then, that man suddenly said something, with a tone as if he was overcome by some kind of emotion.

「Uhhmm.....」

Without understanding the situation, Rio let out a bewildered voice.

He have no recollection of meeting with the people in front of him.

Since Rio had mostly stayed in the village after he came to the kingdom, he only remember the face of someone who he met at that place.

「My deepest apologize. Though I've no recollection of meeting you before, who might you be? 」

With a calm and reserved tone, Rio tried to make sure of the identity of the other side.

The first man was groaning a little in admiration, when he sensed Rio's calm and reserved tone, which was unsuitable for that age*. [TL : It's because he's hiding his true age]

「How impolite of me ! My name is Saga Gouki! This one is my wife, Saga Kayoko. The people behind are my subordinates」

The man called Gouki introduced his companions with a friendly tone.

His subordinates knelt with one knee on the ground, without worrying about dirtying their garments.

That was the etiquette of a retainer.

「H-Ha~.....」

Rio was dumbfounded while staring at them.

As expected, even Rio was unable to follow that all too sudden development.

But, he was sure that kneeling that way was uncomfortable.

「Please quickly raise yourself, as your clothes will be dirty if you keep on kneeling」

Rio said that with a troubled expression.

「But」

With a hesitating tone, those men kept kneeling respectfully in that place.

「Please do so, since I want to ask the situation first. Anyway, let's change the

location」

Thus, Rio said that without an sense of urgency in his tone.

「..... Haa, then, please excuse our discourtesy」

Maybe because he understand Rio's intention, Gouki nodded once and those men rose from the place where they knelt.

「Then, please follow me」

After saying that, Rio guiding them to the edge of the plaza and called out to Yuba.

When she looked at Gouki's party, her eyes opened wide and --.

「As I thought, Gouki-dono immediately came to this village 」

She said that with bitter smile on her face.

「Long time no see, Yuba-dono. Though I apologise for causing a disturbance, as it look like you're in the middle of a good harvest festival」

「Don't worry since it's almost calmed down」

From the subject of their conversation, those two are somehow an old friends.

「Anyway, let's go to our house for the time being. I'll tell the story in that place」

「Our gratitude」

「It's nothing, as I'm the one who called you to come to this place. Then, please follow me. You're coming with us too, Rio」

「Understood.」

He was yet to understand the situation but, Rio abided Yuba's words as he judged that it wasn't a trivial matter.

Translator : Cnine

Editor :

Proofreader : SenjiQ, Jake1456

Part 1

At that moment, in the hall of Yuba's house, four people gathered in one place.

In that place was Rio, Yuba, Gouki and Kayoko.

The people who came along with Kayoko and Gouki became their guards to prevent anyone from hearing their conversation.

「We truly apologise for suddenly borrowing your time, when Rio-sama is still busy」

Gouki expressed his courtesy in a most polite manner, along with a somehow awe-inspiring kneel.

Kayoko on his side was also trying to completely hide her apologetic expression from her face.

「Uhhh, I've yet to understand the core of the story though」

In regards to being unable to fully understand the flow of their story, Rio indirectly expressed his wish for more explanation about the circumstances.

「In that regard, Gouki-dono is getting approval to tell the story of Rio's parents」

To the confused Rio, Yuba told him the most simple explanation.

「The story of my parents, is it?」

Even if he knew that this was his long awaited moment, he was not agitated and asked with calm tone.

This was someone who had obviously come from one of the top most places of the social ladder, and from the fact that he showed his respect to Rio, maybe his circumstances were even more complex than what he thought.

「First is, let me see.... Today we're calling upon Rio-sama to explain his parent circumstances」

Gouki told him that fact with a respectful tone.

Though there was a low probability of badly handling it, even Rio knew that, from today's situation, it was not something to be heard without prior preparation.

「Anyway, we should sit first, right ? 」

Rio turned towards them and advising them to sit first, before hearing their story.

Though he really wanted them to refrain themselves from showing such courtesy, since the current situation didn't give him the chance to ask, he decided to prioritise hearing their story.

「Excuse me」

Gouki excuse himself and sat slowly, followed by Kayoko.

「Well then, I should hear the story now, right?」

「Understood」

Replying with consent to Rio's words, Gouki took a short breath and showed a somewhat melancholic expression.

「That's right This is something that happened around 20 years ago. First, let's start with the story about Zen」

Zen, Rio's father was a soldier who served the Karasuki kingdom.

At that time, the Karasuki kingdom was entering a tense relationship with the Rokuren kingdom, who was already antagonistic with them since long time ago, resulting in repeated skirmishes between those two kingdoms.

The whole kingdom was being burdened by heavy taxes, it also made the livelihood of Yuba's village become harder.

「Nevertheless, Zen, who was the second son, volunteered himself to reduce the number of mouths to feed. One day, by some chance, he stumbled into a soldier recruitment」

When recalling those times, somehow Yuba showed a melancholic expression and muttered in a low voice.

Zen, who was a Spirit Arts genius in addition to his gifted physical

constitution, was even gifted with a talent for martial arts.

Different from the Strahl region, where the Spirit Arts disappeared due to the introduction of magic, though they were very small in number, the people of the Yagumo region still used the Spirit Arts.

That kind of person was extremely valuable in war.

For Karasuki kingdom, who was a the state of Quasi-war, it didn't take that much time for the soldier called Zen to distinguish himself.

Despite just being a skirmish, he decapitated the enemies heads one by one, when his troops faced a crisis he volunteered himself to be left with the rear unit; he always returned alive no matter how hopeless the situation.

To give praise to that achievement, Zen was awarded with a medal from the kingdom and was hailed as a hero of the kingdom.

「Since that time, Zen became a samurai who served the kingdom. Though a person who became a new samurai would have a sparring match with a senior as a custom, that guy's ability was the real deal」

Gouki was the one that appointed to test Zen's ability with a match.

At that time, Gouki was charged with the job of being a protector of the royalty despite his youth, he was the most prominent master in the kingdom at that time.

Though his movements were self-taught, Zen's ability rivaled Gouki's.

Though the result was Gouki's victory by narrow margin, if Zen learnt formal sword arts, Gouki knew that the one who would lose might be himself.

「Dear me, though it was called a sparring match, it's not that often I face a battle that rouses my soul as much as that, that's how much of a battle it was」

Gouki said that with a deep tone, as if being deeply moved when he recalled that time.

Kayoko smiled lightly on seeing the state of her husband.

Zen, who proved his ability with that match, along with Gouki's strong recommendation, entered the post along with Gouki and became a protector of

royalty.

「And that royalty was, Ayame-sama」 [TL : SURPRISEEEEE!!!!]

「.....!!!」

When he heard that his mother was the kingdom's royalty, Rio showed a clearly surprised expression.

Though he already guessed that his parent were people of a somewhat high pedigree, the word "Royalty" was never in his prediction.

Seeing Rio's reaction, Gouki and Kayoko were unable to hold their laughter.

Though Ayame's position terms of throne inheritance wasn't that high, she was a widely famous woman in the neighborhood of the kingdom due to her beauty.

Zen, who was the rising star at that time, was appointed to become her escort.

Though there wasn't any problem due to his military exploit, there were some points he was lacking, like family standing and education. At first, many people envied him for those reasons.

「However, also being charged with the protection of Ayame-sama was this Gouki and Kayoko. My wife comes from a prominent family lineage, even amongst the senior samurai families. Though Kayoko's family is also a little special, it's still an influential one 」

With those two sticking to Zen, there was not that much of a problem as Zen was doing his best with his duty to protect Ayame.

In addition, Zen and Ayame's relationship was also a favourable one; Zen taught many things regarding the outside world to Ayame, who was ignorant about it.

Just like Gouki and Kayoko, it didn't take that long for them to be attracted to each other as a man and woman.

Even from an outsider's perspectives, it was easy to see through their feelings for each other.

Being interested in Zen, sometimes they would also travel incognito to stay in the village, Zen's hometown.

But, despite being hailed as a hero[eiyou], Zen was warrior that rose from a commoner[upstart], and Ayame was royalty.

The difference of social status between them was too big, and Zen was being pressured by that thought.

「At that time, the Rokuren kingdom sent a ceasefire proposal to our kingdom」

The ceasefire had happened so many times during the long time of war.

Though the Rokuren kingdom was the one that always broke it first, even the Karasuki kingdom didn't wish to prolong the war, from the point of view of national treasury. Thus they always accepted the ceasefire.

The ceasefire was being celebrated, also to let the kingdom's citizens vent their dissatisfaction, a grand ceremony was held in the royal capital of the Karasuki kingdom.

The prince of Rokuren also came as an ambassador for entering the ceasefire.

The ceasefire agreement also passed nicely; later the prince was supposed to go back to his home country without any incident.

But, the evening of that day, someone kidnapped Ayame.

The culprit was the assistant of the Rokuren kingdom's prince, who belonged to a dark side that came the conclusion of the ceasefire agreement.

Zen, who was protecting Ayame from the back splendidly, managed to capture that person.

Though some circumstances were omitted, having been trained to commit suicide with an unknown ability, that person was dead.

The next day, while the Karasuki kingdom side asked for explanation of this matter, the Rokuren kingdom prince was angry with reason that his assistant was brutally murdered.

Despite the fact that their opponent is the one who's starting all of this event,

due the sudden death of the culprit, Karasuki kingdom side decided to treat this case with caution.

But, the Rokuren kingdom's prince wouldn't give a shit about it, and made a fuss of himself going all the way to the enemy kingdom, only to be betrayed like that.

The negotiations of both kingdom were going down the drain, just like that, the situation was almost forced the breaking of the ceasefire agreement.

「In that situation, the Rokuren kingdom prince made another point to fix the ceasefire agreement」

Gouki continued his story, with tone as if he was chewing his anger.

「The execution of Zen, who personally killed his assistant, and a demand for Ayame」

Part 2

The fact was that it was truly a shameless demand.

Though he didn't know how to describe the situation, but from Gouki's tone, there was a rumour saying that the prince of the Rokuren kingdom was a distasteful man, whose hobby was philandering on women with his sadism.

If they just let go of Ayame like that, it was easy to imagine what kind of treatment she would get.

In the first place, the ceasefire agreement came from the Rokuren kingdom; maybe their aim was Ayame all along.

They could not help but distrust the Rokuren side.

But, sometimes even that kind of shameless demand couldn't be avoided in diplomacy.

With superb preparation, the Rokuren kingdom prince used his own vassal to distort the summarised story, regarding the truth about that incident, in the capital.

Agitating an unrest in the citizens, regarding the news that the long awaited ceasefire agreement was on the verge of breaking, it was said that they were manipulating the public opinion to favour the conclusion of ceasefire agreement. [TL :how very like of that accursed current president of Indonesia and his bosses, who sold their own country]

The citizen dissatisfaction kept piling up and just like that situation, Ayame was to be sent to the Rokuren kingdom.

And, in the kingdom itself, the number of the nobles who were favouring the war wasn't few in number, either.

Though they could hold their dissatisfaction with the royalty, that was only on the surface.

Though, if the truth of the incident was being told to the citizen it might light their wrath, in that case they couldn't escape from the fate of war, just for the

sake of smearing mud on the Rokuren kingdom's honour.

Though the Rokuren kingdom actions were breaking international laws from one point, by making the first strike, the Karasuki kingdom faced against a disadvantageous position.

But, the Karasuki kingdom no longer trusted the Rokuren kingdom.

While it might be true that they were temporarily accepting the Rokuren kingdom's demand, for the sake of fulfilling the conditions for ceasefire, there were many doubts regarding it.

They could not just swallow the Rokuren kingdom's demand.

On the other hand, it might affect the ceasefire agreement if they announced the truth of the incident, and that would cause an outbreak of conflicts which would drive the warfront into a corner.

They were forced to enter a state of war while pinning the dissatisfaction from a portion of the noble and citizen, furthermore the Karasuki kingdom had to knead an excellent plan to triumph over that situation.

「Thus, his majesty pretending to accept those demands to the public, and gave a secret order for Zen and Ayame-sama to flee」

They could bide their time, temporarily, with the Rokuren kingdom and the noble opposition.

One man and the king carried out a secret operation during that time.

With a scale which couldn't be sniffed out by the Rokuren kingdom and the opposing domestic nobles, picking the most elite amongst the samurai organisation's fighters to dispatch them without being found by the Rokuren kingdom.

「The samurai who were dissatisfied with the Rokuren kingdom were gathered in that operation, including me. The morale of the samurai who participated in that operation was soaring through the heavens」

Soon after that, Zen fled while taking along Ayame.

The Karasuki kingdom announced that news.

Of course, the Rokuren kingdom's indignation was not a joke.

Though many complaints from those who opposed war were directed to Ayame and Zen, thanks to that, they successfully directed the mood to start a war with the enemy kingdom.

Later, the prince of the Rokuren kingdom returned to his kingdom due to anger, which became the trigger to the beginning of the war.

Karasuki kingdom gathered a large army as a diversion, attracting the attention so that the secret unit could go to the Rokuren kingdom.

Of course, they had no choice but to secretly move in the middle of war to ambush the Rokuren kingdom; thus the large army being dispatched where they would start their operation.

Thus the Rokuren kingdom's troops on national border had a glaring contest with the Karasuki kingdom's troops, without knowing that the elite troops of the Karasuki kingdom's samurai had already infiltrated into their kingdom.

The samurai's elite troops were responsible for delivering grievous, one-sided damage to the Rokuren kingdom.

Though the rear side of the Rokuren kingdom also moved quickly, they were unable to leave the battlefield and disregard the enemies facing them.

When the elite troops quickly retreated before they were counter-attacked, finally the Karasuki kingdom's main forces began their attack on the Rokuren kingdom's troops.

Though the Rokuren kingdom's main troops didn't have any choice but to face it, a great disturbance happened in the middle of the battle, caused by the few elite samurai coming from behind and easily taking the head of their general.

The Rokuren kingdom prince was also mixed amongst the captured prisoners during that campaign.

Undoubtedly, that was the greatest historical victory of the Karasuki kingdom.

「The Rokuren kingdom once again frantically proposing a ceasefire agreement」

Gouki showed a really happy expression when he told Rio about the events

during that time.

The Rokuren kingdom's side admitted that they were fully responsible for causing the war, and the prince, who was the mastermind behind that event, was executed in front of the citizens by the Karasuki kingdom. Furthermore, they had to pay a large amount of money to compensate for the damage caused by the war .

The citizen's dissatisfaction lessened due to the compensation from the kingdom.

The Rokuren kingdom's national power greatly declined, and now they had become a vassal state of the Karasuki kingdom, that situation wasn't something that came with war.

It was seen as a huge success for the king, who passed the final judgement on seeing the results.

But, though they had a chance for victory, it was a fact that he deceived his own citizens, which will turned into an unfavourable deadlock, with just a single mistake.

That was why it become unavoidable for him to explain the true reason for the outbreak of the war, it became necessary treat the case of Zen and Ayame desertion as only running away because they're scared of war.

They even put them on the wanted list in the neighbouring kingdom.

Thanks to that, they lost their place and were forced to flee all the way till the Strahl region.

At that time, it was completely obvious, even to the king, that Ayame and Zen had fallen in love with each other.

But, the high wall called social position wouldn't let those two become a couple.

Maybe because she was almost turned into a woman who would become the plaything of that evil prince of the enemy kingdom, and with that unwillingness, even if it meant bridging the relationship between the two kingdoms, she entrusted her everything to Zen; even if that meant that she will live the life of

fugitive, and always go along with great danger during their journey to a far away place.

The actions of Ayame and Zen were seen as treason against their own kingdom.

To add one thing after another, when it came to Zen, his crime was desertion and kidnapping of royalty.

Their secret was guarded carefully as a top secret of the Karasuki kingdom, the ones who knew the truth was Yuba, who was Zen's mother, and part of kingdom's upper echelon.

And Yuba was unable to tell Rio about his parents due to the king's order.

「We were always regretting the fact that we were unable to do anything to help Ayame-sama」

Gouki and Kayoko showed a sad expression.

At that time, inside Kayoko's belly dwelled the life of Hayate, Gouki son.

Politically, the desertion was treated as "due to Zen's recklessness" regarding his duty to protect Ayame, while Gouki and Kayoko remained in the Karasuki kingdom.

「But, few days ago, a letter from Yuba-dono arrived. The content said that Ayame-sama and Zen's son was staying in her village」

It might be referring to another person but, he say that Yuba was his grandmother.

Though he didn't have anything as evidence to his identify, whether Rio was the real deal or a fake one, the possibility that Yuba made a mistake in her judgement was low.

Thus, Gouki immediately reported about that letter to the king, seeking for further instruction.

And then, they were to judge with their own eyes and if they were convinced that Rio is Zen and Ayame's son, they were ordered to bring Rio to royal capital after telling him his parent's past.

Gouki, who receiving that order, carefully picked his most trusted subordinates, then immediately came to the village in a hurry.

「Thus I was overcome by emotions to the point that I offered my bow when I'm looking at Rio-sama countenance. I've no doubt that you're Ayame-sama's son*」 [TL : Poor Zen]

Even Rio had no choice but be a little hasty.

That was just how much he was similar to Ayame.

Today, he couldn't help but recall the face of his dead mother.

「Rio-sama, his majesty wishes to meet you. How about it, will you have no problem to coming along with me ?」

Gouki told him that as if urging him with sincere tone.

「Meeting with his majesty」

For the time being, that person was Rio's grandfather.

Though he didn't want to, he was unable to deny that request in that kind of situation.

It seems they wouldn't leave, either.

The safety was guaranteed by looking at Gouki personality thus far.

「Understood.」

Rio gave his agreement to that wish, despite smiling wryly due to the most unexpected development.

Gouki's expression instantly turned into a joyful one.

「Thank you very much ! Now, I'll explain the circumstances to the people in this place. Those people's ability is real; his majesty and I guarantee that they're trusted people of the dark side of this kingdom. They'll become our convoy in the journey until we reach the royal capital」

After saying that, Gouki's subordinates kneeling once again before Rio to show their loyalty.

Translator : Cnine

Ed/Pr : SenjiQ

Author's Note:

The target of Rio's revenge will be revealed in this chapter.

Not just his name, the description of the time when he murdered Ayame is also written.

Because the king asks about the events that lead to Ayame's death.

Please skip that portion if you have no resistance to that kind of story, and read it after you have steeled your heart.

**TLN : WARNING! THIS CHAPTER IS TRULY NOT FOR
THE WEAK HEARTED ONE!!CONSIDER YOURSELF
PREPARED BEFORE YOU READ THIS**

**EpM : meh this is nothing compared to all what I have read till
now.**

Part 1

The second day after Gouki came to the village.

Rio's existence couldn't be announced to the public, due to how they treated Ayame, so it was decided that the meeting between Rio and the royal couple[king and queen] would be conducted in secret.

Currently, he was staying in the royal castle as a visitor; the people who knew of his parentage was just the royal couple and Gouki, who became his guide.

For the sake of not causing a disturbance, if he become known, no one was told of his parentage, even ones part of the upper echelon who know of his parent's circumstances.

And then, in one room inside the royal castle of the Karasuki kingdom, Rio went to meet with the royal couple, who were his grandparents.

Being guided by Gouki and Kayoko, when he's entering the room, Rio was greeted by queen Shizuku and king Homura.

「Oo, is he the one called Rio?」

Homura spoke Rio's name in fluent way, with a delighted tone.

Shizuku looked intently at Rio's face, as if being overcome with intense emotion.

Prior to meeting his grandparents, he always wondered what kind of people they were. Though he always imagined about them, he could feel some kind of dignity embracing them, giving an impression that they were unexpectedly friendly people.

That soft and tender countenance, the eyes that shined brightly, deep inside, was filled with deep affection towards Rio.

When he was thinking about the conversation, it might have been arranged, and was highly possible, that they would talk after this. Though he couldn't help but be pained when seeing their warm expression, he somehow kept his neutral expression.

「Yes. This is the first time we've met. I'm called Rio」

Rio greeted them formally with polite conduct.

He did that without showing a strained face, with a calm and conducted tone.

「Since it's a reunion with our cute grandchild. There's no need to be so formal in this room. Please stop with that kind of boorish etiquette」

「That's right. You're our grandchild」

Maybe because they felt distance when Rio spoke to them in a formal way, the royal couple showed a troubled expression.

Rio responded to the words of his grandparent while smiling wryly.

Someone just suddenly said that his mother was royalty, in that case he was also royalty. Rio's nerve weren't that shameless, just because he could wear the borrowed mantle of authority and misuse it.

Rio was measuring in what way he would talk to them.

「We won't be perplexed even if it's a lie」

Guessing what he was currently thinking, Homura said that words with clear voice.

Apparently the royal couple was also perplexed.

「But, now, we're happy that we can finally reunite this way.」

Homura said that with a tender smile on his face.

Shizuku also nodded, as if approving of what her husband just said.

「First, why not have a heartwarming family moment after not seeing your family for a long time」

「Yeah, we also have many things we want to ask. Though the time we can meet is limited, let's do our best to tell your story」

Gazing straight into Rio's eye, the royal couple showed a relieved expression.

「Yes」

It would also feel awkward if they suddenly said that they wanted to hear his heavy story from the very beginning.

Nevertheless, now he needed to prepare himself for the moment when he must tell them about “that” story, even just a little.

While thinking such way, Rio’s grinned slightly wider and answered.

「I wonder if it’s okay to sit first ? 」

「Of course, sorry for our discourtesy」

Rio sat on the chair recommended by Homura.

And then, as if saying that there was no need to wait for them, the royal couple conversed with Rio.

They were trying to break the ice with a mild and easy topic first.

Or maybe they were intentionally avoiding when it came to topics regarding Zen and Ayame.

Rio answered their questions with a calm tone, without showing a tense expression, and sometimes looking at the taken out cup with tea inside it.

「Your atmosphere truly resembles Ayame」

Maybe because Rio’s current calm and tranquil bearing was piling up with her deceased daughter’s, Shizuku said that while smiling gently.

When his mother’s name suddenly came out of nowhere, Rio looked at Shizuku with slightly perplexed expression.

「Is that so ? 」

Even though he asked that question himself, Rio’s looked intently at Shizuku.

Thanks to being a user of spirit arts, Shizuku still kept a youthful appearance.

If Ayame was still alive right now, they could be seen as sisters separated by age.

He was imagining that if the Ayame inside Rio’s memories passed her age normally, she might have looked like Shizuku.

「Yeah, it’s true」

And that Shizuku smiled at Rio.

Even Rio smiled lightly, as if being drawn by her soft and tender smile.

He perfectly understood Shizuku's personality with just this smile.

Rio sensed the face of his late mother in Shizuku.

「Will you let us hear about it? About Zen and Ayame」

Shizuku spoke of that topic with completely changed, stiffened expression.

It was not a question just to satisfy her curiosity.

The information regarding the death of Zen and Ayame was already known by Homura and Shizuku.

Though they didn't know the specific reason for their death, they could imagine it, for Zen and Ayame who left towards a foreign land, far away from their own homeland. It was easy to imagine what kind of cruel life waited for people walking such a life.

That was why they were not thoughtlessly asking about such a question.

Though Shizuku was the one who asked that question, he could see a decisive resolution dwelling in Homura's eyes.

「Both of them died during my childhood. Regarding father, I don't remember anything about him except for what was told by mother. Though I vaguely remember parts about him, if you're okay with just 」 [TL : Poor Zen]

And, Rio said that while suppressing the the wrings that happened with his feelings[emotion/heart].

「Of course, we don't mind about it」

「.....Understood」

Reacting to their sincere looks, Rio took a deep breath, and spoke without hiding anything regarding Zen and Ayame.

The contents were mostly identical with the one he told to Yuba.

He had almost nothing to talk about Zen, it was mainly about Ayame.

To Ayame's story told by Rio, Homura smiled as if dearly missing her, while Shizuku cried softly.

The story kept going on; soon it reached the topic about Ayame's death.

「And then, mother died when I was 5 years old」

As expected, he was hesitating whether to tell them the fact that she was murdered after being raped; Rio just told them that she was dead, while leaving out the cause of her death.

「5 years old then How did you live after that ? 」

Part 2

Shizuka timidly asked him.

Though she was thinking about asking the details regarding Ayame death, it seemed that the impact of him who became an orphan when he was still just 5 years old was stronger.

Yuba asked the same things.

When Rio noticed that, he took a deep breath and felt relieved.

「..... Orphan. lived their life in slums of the royal capital」

When Rio casually said that he was an orphan before.

The royal couple was slightly overwhelmed by his tone, that didn't have any hint of dissatisfaction for his bygone past-self.

「.....!!!」

But, when Shizuku suddenly cried.

「But, I was an orphan till I was 7 years old」

Rio told that fact while smiling wryly.

「I see then, what kind of life did you live after you were 7 years old ? 」

Homura asked about Rio's livelihood after that.

「After 7 years old, I was attending an educational institution of that country due to some trifling incident」

The topic was naturally shifting to Rio.

「Educational institution ? Though there some places like that in this kingdom, that 」

By no means was it a place in which an orphan could go.

The reason for that was, that establishment was mainly aimed at wealthy people.

It didn't seem to be any different no matter what country it was.

Just how did Rio, who was an orphan, attend that kind of place? Though he wanted to ask him about that, it was clearly an extraordinary matter; Homura couldn't bring himself to ask Rio.

「By some unexpected event, I unexpectedly saved an important person of that country, thus I was able to receive an education in relation to that event」

Rio then told them the details regarding that event, omitting some behind the scenes events.

「I see the fact that you can still save others despite your adversity is something you must proud of」

Though there was no facade in those words, Rio might still have hid something.

And Homura held that doubt in his mind.

His eyes closed slightly, as he was unable to detect if there was a change in Rio's expression.

But, even Homura, with his wide array of experience in facing many kinds of people as a king, couldn't read what transpired in Rio's heart.

In that time, Rio briefly spoke about his live in the royal academy.

When he heard Rio's story, Homura ignored his doubt for the time being.

Rio's story was mainly about his gratitude toward Seria, while he was not mentioning about the bullying he got from the noble kids who lived in academy. [ED: a gratitude he repaid by forgetting the one thing she asked; sending letters]

Thus Rio didn't tell everything about his hardship during that time, but there was no way for him, who was originally an orphan, to live a life without any hardship in that kind of place.

The royal couple who heard his story somehow smiled sadly when they noticed that he didn't tell them any of hardships he experienced during that time.

「Well, various things happened after that, thus I began my journey toward Yagumo while thinking that I must hold a memorial service to father and

mother in their homeland, when I was 12 years old」

「..... That was truly hard life」

Homura muttered in a low voice.

[They could tell] just by hearing the outline of Rio's story, even if it was unpleasant, that Rio lived a cruel life.

Becoming an orphan at 5, crossing over towards the Yagumo region from Strahl region to hold a memorial service at 12, normally that was something unbelievable.

Even Gouki and Kayoko were speechless and showed a gloomy expression when they heard his story inside that room.

「No, I'm glad that I came to this country. And learning about my parents past. Even if it's the only result of coming to this country」

Smiling lightly, Rio said that with a clear, bright tone, as if trying to wipe the unbearable mood that everyone in the room felt before.

Homura gasped on seeing Rio's smile.

「I see」

Homura stayed silent while keeping his eyes closed, just barely managed to smile wryly.

The room was enveloped by a short silence.

Homura was took one deep breath, and opened his mouth to ask about that muddled fact[hidden fact] to Rio.

「By the way, aside from Zen's death, I didn't hear anything regarding how Ayame died. Won't you tell me about it? 」

It meant that he wanted to hear the actual facts without any hidden parts in that story.

Though he expected for the reason why Rio hid that fact, Homura still wanted to know about it.

「..... It's not something pleasant to hear, is that okay?」

Rio, who was indirectly asking for their resolution to hear that story, made Homura raised his vigilance.

Do you really want to hear about it?.

That story was certainly a nauseating story for them.

「It's something that we must know. We were the ones who caused such hardship to befall upon you, by driving out that child from this kingdom, after all」

「Yeah, even if we know that talking about that fact is cruel to you, we cannot help but want to know about it. Sorry for bringing such cruel request 」

Even though her head was slightly hanging, when Shizuku said those words, he could feel her strong conviction.

The royal couple knew that they were hurting Rio by made him to recall his painful past with their questions.

Even if they knew that, they were being selfish by doing that, even if it was likely that they were going to be cursed by Rio, they still chose to ask the reason for Ayame's death to Rio.



「I see.....」

Thus, Rio muttered with weak voice.

He shut his eyes as if being perplexed by something, and taking a little deep breath.

「Mother was murdered. In front of my eyes」

Thus after resolving his heart, Rio bluntly told them that fact.

「.....!!!」

Though he expected to some extent, Homura, who received such great shock, was unable to hide his shocked expression.

Though it was obvious that they needed some time to hide their shock, Rio already started to tell them the circumstances surrounding his mother's death at that time.

「First, the one who killed mother is a man called Lucius」

Part 3

In the 5 years since Rio's father, Zen, passed away, Rio has live with his mother, Ayame, in a simple house somewhere in the royal capital.

With her beloved husband passed away before her, Rio, who was still a baby, was the only one left for Ayame.

In addition, she was unable to leave Rio alone for work, so she have no choice but to live from her savings.

Thank god that Zen and Ayame lived frugally, she had some amount of savings, enough till Rio grew to some extent.

But, live was more difficult than prediction, she couldn't even take her eyes off Rio, even if she just went out to market for a bit.

An adventurer called Lucius was the one who saved Ayame during that time.

The first time they met was when Ayame and Zen were going to the adventurer's guild of Bertram kingdom for the first time.

The one that called out to foreigner like Zen and Ayame, who were yet to familiarized themselves with the foreign country, and looked after them was Lucius.

He Introduced a productive job to Zen by the time Ayame was pregnant with Rio, and occasionally formed a party with him.

Though at a glimpse Lucius had a vulgar appearance along with an unshaven beard, he was a true gentleman.

Lucius assisted Ayame, who was raising Rio alone after Zen's death.

Rio even remember that Lucius occasionally visited Ayame.

Playing with Rio with friendly atmosphere.

But, that was acting all along.

Someday when Rio already 5 years old, since there was a job that she can't leave alone, no matter what, Ayame entrusted Rio's rearing to Lucius.

That day, Lucius suddenly transformed into a cruel man, as if he was a different person.

Right after Ayame went out, Lucius's expression filled with joy, as if his repressed emotions suddenly exploded.

Looking at Lucius's expression, Rio unintentionally retreating, as he feeling dread from it.

But, Lucius's raised his leg, and kicked hard at Rio's abdomen.

「GA!」

Rio's still young body danced in the middle of air while letting out a dull sound.

Rio's body was attacked by a great impact following right after that.

「Oy, you can enter now」

Leaving Rio who was suffering in pain, Lucius left the house and invited unfamiliar men to enter the house.

Rio looked at that scenery with his hazy consciousness.

Why you kicked my belly?.

Where has that kind Lucius gone to?.

「W.....h.....y? 」

Rio asked that question with his gasping breath.

「Why? Coz it's ripe enough to be harvested ya'know」

Lucius mouth warped sinisterly and only saying that.

「That's why. Sleep for a while, Rio-kun」

He then clogging Rio mouth with a cloth soaked in some strange drug, and Rio lost his consciousness.

And then, by the time Rio opened his eyes, Ayame had already been raped by Lucius. [TL : damn it, I hate this chapter] [ED: Really hate it]

Though the Rio at that time didn't know what Lucius did to Ayame, he knew that it wasn't something liked by Ayame.

When he noticed that Rio has woken up, Lucius keep on raping Ayame, as if to show that to Rio.

Though Ayame hated it, she just following Lucius words silently, if he said that he'd hit Rio.

「Oy, throw this brat to slum」

After Ayame was strangled to death by Lucius, as it was something that couldn't be undone, Lucius ordered his subordinate to throw Rio into the Slum.

「Hee, you're not gonna kill him ? 」

Someone asked with curious tone.

「Oyoy, doing something like that isn't interesting at all. It's not the time to harvest this brat yet」

「H-Harvest huh ? 」

The man spoke in an excited tone, hearing Lucius saying that in a good mood.

「If this brat survives, he'll come to get his revenge to me. Killing him who's trying to get his revenge for his family is the best feeling ever」

「Ha-haha 」

In his dim consciousness, the figure of Lucius laughing in madness was imprinted in Rio's mind.

Then, they dump Rio in the slum, though he finally managed to going back to his house after walking in the royal capital, following his vague memories, the key of the house was shut tightly; he even lost his property.

Since there was no decent family register, he didn't even have any means to prove that he was Ayame's son.

Thus, Rio wandered around the slum for two years.

「That's all of it」

Rio told that story with a cold, and indifferent tone, with calm smile.

A gloomy atmosphere filled the inside of that room.

Homura kepted his eyes closed while his body trembled, Shizuku was

weeping and covered her face with the palm of her hands.

Gouki angry expression laid bare, Kayoko's expression was as cold as ice itself, all of them thinking.

They were staring at Rio.

「Rio, you must resent us for what we did to For us to make Ayame go through such things」

As if being unable to bear Rio's silence, Homura muttered in a somehow low and subdued voice.

「I did」

Rio said that clearly without any shred of hesitation.

「.....!!!」

Though they were preparing themselves to receiving his resentment, that single phrase pierced deeply into their hearts, their body started to tremble.

But, his next sentence brought them back to reality.

「Though it's not strange if someone said those words in this kind of situation, I didn't have any particular resentment towards all of you」

Rio smiled wryly.

Homura and the others were looking at Rio with dumbfounded expression.

Then, why did Rio was showing the same surprised expression as them.

Rio was astonished that he unconsciously mislead Homura and the others, like a villain.

Thus he created a strange atmosphere that way.

「I really didn't have any kind of resentment towards you guys」

Part 4

Rio was somehow smiling dejectly, shaking head from left to right while saying those words.

「I already heard the circumstances of that time from Gouki-dono, the situation at time left you with no choice but to expulse father and mother —」

Though they were driven away from the kingdom to keep the honour of the kingdom, Zen and Ayame still obediently left their kingdom.

Since they couldn't marry if they're not leave the kingdom.

「Since I could be with my mother, despite it only for a short time —」

Rio knew.

Ayame never regretted being forced to leave her own kingdom.

「Thus, I know that mother was blessed with happiness. It feels wrong if I resent all of you because of it, right」

Rio looked at the horizon, as if recalling the memories with his mother.

Even if Zen passed away, Ayame didn't grieve on her own fate.

Ayame cherished everyday she spent along with Zen, she poured same amount of love to Rio, similar to Zen.

Ayame's expression was full of happiness when she told Rio about Zen, when she was looking after Rio, and never any pain in front of Rio.

She never even felt an ounce of regret in leaving her kingdom, no need to say that she's also did not resent her parent and Gouki.

In that case, his resentment missed the point if he resented them.

The one he should resent is the person who killed his mother.

「I see 」

Homura hung his head deeply, his body was trembling on hearing Rio's words.

After Rio said his word of resentment[fake] sometime ago, Rio current words

pierced deep in his chest.

He couldn't help that he feel weak when he recalled those word.

「Ayame」

Shizuku's sobbing voice resounding inside of the room.

No, it's not just Shizuku's.

Everyone inside that room except for Rio was crying.

Thus time flowed by.

Shizuku's crying voice subsided before long, and a silence descended in the room.

At that time, Homura rose his line of sight ——.

「That man was called Lucius, right? Rio, are you going to Are you going to get your revenge on that man?」

Those words suddenly coming out like water bursting from broken dam.

Since everyone who had their important person snatched away would think about the same things.

That might be why Homura suddenly asked that question.

「Yes」

Homura took a deep sigh in his heart, his facial expression was as if he was enduring it on hearing an already expected answer.

「I see..... I also loathed that man. But, there's something that I must say if you're going to walk on this path」

After saying that, Homura squinted his eyes, looking at Rio as if trying to measure his resolution.

「What is it?」

Rio asked while directly receiving Homura's line of sight.

「Revenge isn't justice. Some even say that revenge is revenge. Do you understand that?」[ED: and people die when they're killed...][TL : And resurrected, in most of Xianxia]

「Yes」

「I see, Even so you're going to kill him right ? 」

「Yeah, if that man is still alive till now, I'll kill him with my own hands」

Rio declared his will indifferently, with calm and clear voice, and without warping his dignified expression.

It was not the eyes of someone being imprisoned by his revenge, nor someone trying to deluding himself, nor someone eager to get his revenge.

They were the eyes of someone who was resolved to go through following his resolution, even though such resolution didn't exist in this world.

「I see. In that case, I won't stop you」

Someone's emotion weren't something so light that they could be erased with just lip service.

If Rio had lost his himself, he was going to advise him to not go through such a thorny road, as his grandfather.

But, the current Rio didn't show the signs of losing himself.

Homura, with his long years of experience as a ruler, knew about that.

「..... But, you must know too, that some degree of power is needed to accomplish that. Won't you try to have a match with Gouki? 」

Homura said those words after a brief silence.

Translator : Cnine

Editor : SenjiQ

Proofreader : Jake1456

Part 1

「A match against Gouki-dono ? 」

Rio's words paused for a moment before replying to Homura.

And then, he questioned with a tone full of suspicion.

「You must be surprised when you're suddenly asked for a match. My apologies」

「Not at all, I just find it a little difficult to find the purpose for that 」

Rio just smiled wryly, and expressed what came to mind, to Homura, who was apologizing to him.

「Words are a little insufficient, huh. I just thought of giving you a little help with that. You need sufficient power to accomplish your revenge, right? 」

「That's..... Right」

Homura continued while looking at Gouki.

「In this kingdom, and not just this kingdom, even in neighbouring kingdoms, Gouki is the strongest samurai with a long military service. I think that you'll learn something by having a match against him」

An Ikkitousen^[2] at war, dubbed as Kishin^[3], an uncountable number of strong people were slaughtered by him in wars.

Homura had full faith in Gouki's power, which came from his trust and achievements throughout his long years of military service.

Homura was thinking that his grandson would definitely acquire precious experience if he put his grandson under that person.

「Though I really want us to have a long and warm chat, due to the next situation, I'm unable to attend you more than this, today」

Homura made a wry smile and sighed a little.

It was not that easy to just create even a little time for him to meet Rio like that.

If the meeting with Rio was too long, there was some chance that some vassal would question what happened to Homura and Shizuku^[4] that were taking so long to appear; meticulous attention was necessary.

All of that was to conceal Rio's existence, so conspicuous actions were unnecessary.

「I'll prepare some time for a secret meeting again tomorrow. Though you'll be staying at Gouki's home today, how about you see and try to have a match with him in his dojo? 」

「I see.」

Rio finally grasped Homura's intentions.

「In that case, if Gouki-dono is willing to 」

Smiling broadly, Rio was accepting of Homura's proposal.

It was clear to Gouki that Rio wasn't an ordinary person. [TL : He's a reincarnated person after all]

Though there was no lack of that kind of opponent during Rio's time in Seirei no Tami village, he was only doing individual training since the start of his journey to Yagumo.

He had wished to have a bout with a strong person for a long time.

As soon as Gouki received his orders.

「I don't mind. Since I know that Rio-sama is quite powerful too」

Gouki also grinned widely and gave his consent to a match.

Different from Homura, Gouki had already seen through Rio's power.

Though he refrained himself from personally applying for a match, Homura's order was, coincidentally, approving his wish.

「Fumu. It's decided then」

Homura nodded a little, as if satisfied with that.

Just like that, their meeting ended —.

「Rio, you'll come here again, right? 」

Shizuku asked Rio, just before leaving the room.

「Yeah.....」

Though he was perplexed by that question, Rio answered while approaching Shizuku.

And then, she gently hugged Rio.

「You're growing up becoming this big alone. All alone till you become this big. Thank you very much」

Shizuku said those words with a muddy voice while covering Rio's roughly 6 feet^[5] of height with her body.

Rio's body stiffened a little when he was suddenly hugged by Shizuku.

But, his body immediately relaxed when he sensed Shizuku's warmth.

「It's nothing, I'm really glad that I've given a chance to meet you. Though we can't freely meet like this in the future, for now, I'm looking forward to meeting you again tomorrow」

His arms moved timidly to embrace Shizuku, it was as if he was trying to give her some relief.

「Eh.....」

Shizuku was looking at Rio's face from a point blank range, there was a faint smile on her soon to leave face.

Shizuku's face, that he was looking at point blank range, wasn't an expression as royalty; it was the expression of a grandmother who was cherishing her grandson.

Though, his so called grandmother looked a bit too young to be called one.

Homura looked at them with a kind smile on his face.

「Let's go, Shizuku」

「Yeah.....」

Their position as royalty, which made them unable to meet their beloved grandson as much as they wanted, was truly sad indeed.

Homura called to Shizuku with an expression that was as if he was saying those words.

Shizuku nodded in agreement, transparent tears could be seen streaming on her face.

Just like that, those two left the room.

「Well then, Rio-sama. Let me guide you to my house」

Gouki immediately said that after Homura and Shizuku left that room.

「Yes. Please」

Rio replied with a calm voice.

After that, Rio left the royal castle, following Gouki and Kayoko.

The residence of the Saga family was located in the nearby Samurai district, in the heart of the royal capital.

A tranquil atmosphere filled the Samurai district, without too many people to be seen on the street.

Each of the residences were surrounded by pine-like trees which were planted at calculated distances.

「This way please」

Being guided by Gouki and Kayoko, he entered a gigantic residence which would overpower everyone who saw it^[6].

The Saga house was very conspicuous amongst the other samurai families in the district due to their prominent residence.

The house was made of mortar and wood, and exuded a profound feeling by coating it with a red colored paint.

Rio looked with admiration at that splendid exterior.

When he walked forward and entered the garden, the voice of still young girl^[7] resounded.

「Father, mother ! Welcome back! 」

Part 2

What appeared was a lovely girl who looked like she was not even 10 years old yet.

She was wearing a red hakama and white dougi^[8] with a wooden sword in one of her hand.

Her beautiful, jewel-like large eyes, though her face was rather thin, along with her smooth and porcelain like soft skin; every bit of her were the best parts, along with her innocent attitude.

Her silky, long, jet-black hair, which reached down her back, under her neck, as if to make a beautiful sound when it rustled against her garment.

「Ooh, Komomo. We're back」

Gouki let out a loose smile which was unsuited to his grim face.

Maybe because he could also show that kind of expression, Rio's eyes opened slightly wide.

「Father, this person is 」

Noticing Rio's existence, the girl called Komomo asked curiously.

「Sorry for the late introduction, Rio-dono. This child is mine and Kayoko's child; her name is Komomo. Komomo, please greet Rio-dono」

They had decided that they would mask Rio as one of their guests during his stay in their house.

Though the ones that should be paying attention were Gouki and Kayoko.

Though they seemed a little too polite to the young Rio, that alone was the bottom line for Gouki and Kayoko which they were unwilling to compromise.

「Yes! I'm Saga Komomo-desu! Nice to meet you」

Komomo greeted Rio while showing an innocence smile on her face.

「Nice to meet you. I'm called Rio」

Rio also returning her greeting and nodding his head a little to show his courtesy.

「Well then, we should go to the dojo immediately. Komomo, is Hayate currently in the dojo?」

「Yes! He was training along with me till some time ago」

「I see. I'll have a match with Rio-dono right now. You may watch it too」

Komomo answered with cheerful voice, as if Rio and Gouki's match piqued her interest.

Taking along Komomo with them to the dojo, in that place was Hayate, gripping his wooden sword in silence.

「Ah, father, mother, you've retur Rio-dono ! 」

Hayate smiled happily when he saw Gouki and Kayoko's figures.

But, he let out scream-like voice when he discovered someone who shouldn't have been in that place.

「Hello. It's been a while, Hayate-dono」

Rio greet him when he saw Hayate, while smiling wryly on seeing his reaction.

「Yeah, nice to meet you, it's been a while. How has Rio-dono come to this place ? Could it be about that man who did that insolence act to Ruri-dono? Though it seems that man should be doing forced labour in some place 」

Hayate was plainly having some kind of misunderstanding about the reason Rio came to his house.

Or a reason for Rio to come to that place might just not have come into his mind.

Nonetheless, it was only natural, since Hayate didn't know about Rio's origin.

「Rio-dono will stay in our house as our guest. You too may watch my match with Rio-dono after this」

「Ye-yes 」

Hayate gave his consent despite his surprise.

Though his mind was looking for a reason why Rio was staying in his house, now wasn't the right time to ask about that.

Hayate was steadily preparing the preparations for the match between Gouki and Rio, while still being perplexed.

With wooden swords in their hands, Gouki and Rio faced each other in the center of the dojo.

Approaching between them was the referee, Kayoko.

「This isn't a death match. There will be healing with Spirit Arts for wounds, so please fight to your heart's content」

Kayoko announced the rules of the match with calm voice.

「Uhm」

「Yes. Understood」

Gouki replied vigorously while Rio replied calmly.

He loosened and tightened the grip of his hands on the wooden sword, as if trying to get used to it and then, took a stance.

Gouki also completed his preparation and took a stance.

「BEGIN ! 」

The match started with a signal from Kayoko.

In that moment, Gouki's intimidating aura swelled up.

Though it made anyone want to leave, no one left that place.

Though a bit of cold sweat appeared on Hayate's forehead, Komomo looked at them with considerably nervous expression.

With the exception of Rio and Gouki, only Kayoko didn't even sweat a bit.

As for Rio who was being exposed to Gouki intimidation from the front, he calmly took his stance as usual, with a calm face.

One second, two seconds, though it was already one minute since the start of the match, the two of them just silently observed each other.

To the two people who didn't start moving, no matter how much time passed,

Hayate and Komomo were surprised as people who knew Gouki's habits.

Gouki, who was famous as stalwart slaughterer, would boldly attack his opponents in an instant the battle begin.

That was not something cheap like pride, it came from his own assessment of his overwhelming power and skill; thus he could take such risks.

His nickname "Kishin" came from his Ogre-like prowess, he was the type of military man who would induce his opponents into moving on their own accord, even during a match.

And that Gouki was rooted on the spot, without moving an inch.

Thus it was no exaggeration, even if they were surprised.

Against Rio, Gouki judged that it wasn't to forcefully closing their gap.

It would be the end for him if he made a bad move.

He could easily measure the extent of Rio's power with just that.

A ferocious smile appeared on Gouki's face.

Because facing Rio was more difficult than he expected, he concentrated to an extent that had never happened before.

Negligence by unskillfully hiding his true ability would be fatal.

He quickly abandoned his initial thought of hiding his true ability, after instinctively guessing that.

"ChiriChiri", Gouki's pressure gradually swelled up.

Without any tension felt from Gouki's muscles, he just fired his spirit, as if he wanted to completely drain it.

In a moment, without any pre-movement, without taking a second, Gouki entered Rio's range*. [TL* : Shukuchi[Instant Movement/Ground Shrink]]

Borrowing power from the momentum of his movement, Gouki swung his wooden sword, which was easily deflected by Rio.

The high-pitched sound of their wooden swords hitting violently at each other resounded in the dojo.

With their swords locked at each other, their line of sight intersected at point blank range.

Gouki was deeply moved by Rio who easily defended against an attack that came from him which come without showing any pre-movement.

Though he received an order from Homura to give a guidance to Rio if his power is insufficient, it seemed such worries were unnecessary.

Part 3

「With this kind of skill at this age. You've already far exceeded me[washi] and Zen at that age. It gives me a chill just thinking that it's not even your golden age, with muscles and experience has yet to mature」

「Since I didn't know how strong father was, I kept training and training」

Somehow being pushed back, Gouki put more power into his arms.

But, Rio warding that Gouki's power by turning his body around using that power.

Just like that, Rio slashed at Gouki from under his arms and the sound of wooden swords violently clashing at each other resounded inside the dojo.

Gouki barely managed to stop Rio's attack.

「..... That was close」

Gouki was smiling happily when he received Rio's merciless attack, which precisely aimed at the gaps in his attack.

「How come I didn't see that coming ? 」

Rio calmly pulled back one of his feet while saying those words.

And then shifting his wooden sword and, as if it lengthened, it pierced at Gouki neck.

「Kuh, this kind of fighting isn't something that can be enjoyed often ! No need to hold back ! 」

Avoiding it by paper-thin margin, loading more power into his grip, Gouki released three stabs which could be said as flash.

But, Rio also brilliantly repelled that.

「Haha」

A dry laugh leaked out from Rio's lips.

That merciless stab just then was an ability that had been polished to a terrifying degree.

How many years, I wonder; it might have already been dozens of years since I continuously swung my sword. [TL : it mean that ALL of his previous enemies is INSTAKILLED]

As he say that with just his skill, Gouki was far above everyone else who fought with Rio up until then.

Though the basics of his physical ability as human race was low, from the fact that he could gain superhuman strength by using Spirit arts, put him as the strongest person who fought Rio up until then, in close combat.

「Though Zen was also genius in martial arts, it seems Rio-sama is even more than that ! 」

Gouki relentlessly attacked Rio with two stabs, that were even more fierce than the previous three stabs.

Rio flicked that attack by aiming at the handle.

「GUH」

In the gap when Gouki's sword straying from its path, Rio drove a powerful kick into Gouki's body.

Though he managed to block that kick with his left arm, Gouki was still vigorously blown away.

Hayate looked in shock at that scene, even Kayoko lost her composure.

Just one person, Komomo, was the only one who was looking at that scene with sparkling eyes. [TL : Komomo inside voice "I found my husband"]

Utilizing the power of that kick, Gouki widened his distance from Rio.

But, in that instant, Rio drew closer to Gouki with mixture of steps at godspeed, and like an optical illusion shortened their distance in one go.

「KUH」

Gouki was countering instinctively to Rio, who closed their distance in an instant.

Letting out awkward voice, he barely managed to reflect Rio's sword.

Rio relentlessly rained one attack after another into Gouki.

Dozens of sounds of swords clashing at each other resounded in the dojo in just mere seconds.

「Mun ! 」

Gouki, who was being oppressed, stabbed his sword downward, as if it were following the fleeting gap in Rio's attack.

The attack that was supposed to hit its target was easily avoided when Rio turned his body.

Though it was immediately followed by Rio's slashing attack, Gouki stopped that blow immediately.

「Guh, that gap was a trap, huh. Wonderful」

Though he said that in an awkward voice, Gouki's smile said that he was really happy.

He vaguely sensed that his body was noisy when he caught Rio's attack by reflex.

「Though I think that defending all of my attacks with just reflex is even more amazing」

「It can't be helped, I have overwhelming battle experience as a warrior in that regard ! 」

And numerous slashes were exchanged between them for a second time.

They were not even knowing who was the one who initiating the attacks when their swords violently clashed at each other.

Those two kept attacking at each other till they drained their strength but, with natural sixth sense and experience, handling and twists, they were defending all the attacks that came at them.

Just like that, their swords clashed at each other hundreds of times; Hayate and Komomo were looking at that exchange of offense and defense with dumbfounded expressions.

「Father is being pushed back 」

Though dumbfounded by the situation, Hayate could analyze the progress of

the combat.

Gouki, he was famous as the strongest warrior, not to just in the Karasuki kingdom, even in the Yagumo region,.

The name of “Kishin” wasn’t just for show.

And such person was at his wit’s end, he was being overwhelmed by a young boy who’s even younger than himself[Hayate].

Against Gouki, who couldn’t hit Rio even once, Rio was adding more and more to his attack to hit Gouki once or twice.

If they were using real sword, Gouki’s body would be filled with laceration.

Against Gouki’s proper swordsmanship, Rio’s combat style was an irregular mix of taijutsu* and kenjutsu**. [TL* : Hand to hand combat] [TL** : Swordsmanship]

He was using his sword in one hand, while launching sharp blows, in order to surprise his opponent, with the rest of his arms and legs.

Moreover, one might faint in agony when they receive such an attack, and lose their consciousness.

Gouki, who was unable to predict those attacks when they came, had taken who knows how many of those strikes.

Though he was dissipating their power the moment he guarded against those attacks, by shifting his body, his feet still trembled a little.

But, Gouki’s stance didn’t falter one bit, even with that.

His flesh and blood, as if saying that he wouldn’t easily let go of such emotions while dancing in combat, smiled ferociously, he strengthened his resolve and launched a bold attack at Rio*. [TLC* : こんな血肉が湧き踊る戦いを
そう簡単に終わらせてたまるかと言わんばかりに、猛々しい笑みを浮かべ、果敢にリオ
に攻撃を仕掛けていた。]

「Ha-h, Ha~h, Ha~h. It’s thrilling ! 」

When he shouted loudly in the middle of combat, Gouki praised Rio without holding back.

Though they were exchanging countless attacks when he said that, he would soon run out of ways to handle Rio's attacks, thus Gouki widened his distance with Rio.

「D-Don't tell me, FATHER ! That technique! ? 」

Seeing Gouki, who's taking a stance with his wooden sword by opening the distance with his opponent, Hayate raised his voice in surprise.

That was the stance of Gouki when he was about to release a certain technique, which he had seen several times.

The violent pressure, like an avalanche that would swallow everything in its path, was fired in Rio's direction.

「Saga style, First Ougi* of the Longsword, HEAVEN'S JUDGEMENT ! 」[TL* : Secret arts] [TL : He's unexpectedly a closet Chuuni]

Screaming the name of his technique, Gouki swung his sword and released a flashing slash toward Rio's direction.

That was a vacuum sword created by using spirit arts.

From the fact that spirit arts didn't need an aria, which made it different from magic, one did not even needed to say the name of their technique.

But, a spirit art's power was directly connecting to the power of imagination, in addition to magical power manipulation.

Though saying the name of a technique can be seen as futile, it helped the user to strengthening their imagination.

Part 4

In addition, Gouki was continuously and earnestly swinging his sword for a long time.

That kind of man, leading for a long time without any futile actions, was releasing wind spirit arts and swinging his sword, thinking only to cut down the opponent before his eyes.

That power would surely to cut him in two with a single stroke; though the range of attack wasn't wide, it could easily cut several people in half at once.

Gouki's vacuum slash arrived in front of Rio in an instant.

After confirming with that sword, due to turbulence of the Odo loaded into that sword, Rio sensed its cutting edge's sharpness by instinct.

He could be cut in two if he caught that blow with his wooden sword, as it was.

That kind of image appeared inside his head.

He instantly created blade of compressed water with spirit arts, and swung that sword with his left hand towards the vacuum blade.

An explosive sound resounded inside the dojo along with the clash, and a large amount of water scattered inside the room.

「Muh ! ? 」



Gouki groaned due to the reduced field of vision, because of the sprays of

water.

At that time, Rio touched the pointed end of his wooden sword at Gouki's back.

「It's my loss. Really, to instantly create that amount of water, in a place without any moisture, with spirit arts I'm completely defeated」

He released the power from his body and smiled happily, Gouki personally announced his defeat.

The amount of water that flooded the room rained incessantly.

Even if a spirit arts user had some aptitude with the water element, it was not that easy to create that amount of water.

And creating that in an instant, no less to say condensing that amount of water and then altered its shape to form a sword shaped water, within that instant.

It was truly a terrifying spirit arts skill.

「Game set」

While the people inside that room were still dumbfounded, the one who first came back to her senses was Kayoko, who then announced the end of the match with calm voice.

「F-Father ! Why were you going too far with that last attack!?!」

Hayate also finally snapped back to his senses.

He rebuked Gouki regarding him using the Ougi in his last attack.

「Because I knew if it's Rio-dono, he could surely handled that Ougi. Isn't he practically alright without any scratches right now?」

Smiling wryly, Gouki said that to stop his son's confusion.

「I-Isn't that just by your instincts ! ? 」

Even when he heard Gouki's explanation, Hayate still didn't agree with that.

Though it was okay since he defended against it, Rio's body would surely have been bisected if he got hit by that attack.

「Hayate. You should know since you watched it, that attack didn't even touch Rio-dono」

「Certainly, Rio-dono is blessed with an uncommon strength but」

Hayate was speechless. Though he couldn't agree with his father, he couldn't talk back smoothly.

「Gouki-dono thought of releasing that technique since he judged that I could deal with it」

Then, Rio interrupted between those two.

「Is, that so ? 」

「Yeah, it's different if that technique was used as a surprise attack during combat, that kind of way to release a technique is as if saying to deal with this attack fair and square, from the front」

「That's.....」

No one could cope with that technique, even if they knew it was coming.

First was, since it was not strange even if Rio's body was paralyzed and could only catch that blow only with his guts.

Moreover, seeing everything and then coping with that vacuum blade, at least Hayate was surely unable to do that.

Hayate gulped his saliva when he was imagining himself as the one who had to cope with that technique.

「I know your concern Hayate. Well, I thought you were gonna retreat from it^[9] 」

Though he said the first half with a satisfied expression, the second half was muttered with almost vanished voice.

Gouki used that Ougi as a show of technique, he fired it with the assumption that Rio was going to avoid it.

Though that attack might have torn the dojo wall if it was avoided, that was just something trivial.

When he sent a fleeting gaze toward Kayoko, Gouki noticed that she was

sending a piercing cold glare towards him.

(Muh, I was a little too passionate. She'll certainly preach at me for this later)

Though he know that Rio can handle it, it was no different from firing a dangerous technique to show his respect for his opponent, so receiving a rebuking for doing that is inevitable.

Remembering the times when his calm and beloved wife released her freezing scolding made Gouki drenched in cold sweat.

「I shouldn't have used that kind of dangerous technique. My apologies, Rio-dono」

After his head switched to normal little by little, Gouki bowed his head deeply to Rio.

「No need for that, see I'm still alright. And I got a chance to see such a splendid technique」

As for Rio, since he knew when he saw that technique, he didn't feel any resentment or anger.

「U-Uhm ! 」

Komomo's lively voice suddenly resounded in the dojo, the others lines of sight turned towards Komomo.

「Please have a match with me ! 」

Komomo looked at Rio with her big eyes gleaming brightly.

「Uhhmm.....」

Rio was speechless to Komomo's sudden request.

「Fuhahaha, even Komomo is being charmed by his power. You're itching for it after seeing mine and Rio-dono's match just now, right」

Gouki explaining the situation to Rio.

「Yes! That was a magnificent battle! You're the first person who has defeated father! 」

Komomo said that while showing her innocent smile.

「Please ! 」

Part 5

Komomo asked with a vigorous voice while saying that.

That earnest wish reached Rio.

「That's right. If you're okay with it」

「Thank you, Rio-dono. Komomo. Rio-dono's skill is far above you. Please take this chance as training with a more skilled opponent」

「Yes! Thank you very much ! 」

Gouki gives his gratitude to Rio who accepted Komomo's wish.

Komomo said her gratitude to Rio with a brilliant smile.

「Then, Let's do something about the water in the room first」

After saying that, Rio made a whirlpool, made of the scattered water in the room.

Then, he made it flow to the outside of the dojo through windows.

During those several seconds, Gouki and the others was watched that spectacle with a dumbfounded look.

「Rio-dono's spirit arts don't seem to be half-hearted too」

「No, going that far is 」

Judging from Gouki and the others reactions, it looked like the way Rio used spirit arts was too difficult for them.

Rio didn't have a full understanding of how skillful the people of the kingdom were in using spirit arts.

That much was just child's play for Oufia the high-elf, even the others Seirei no Tami, who excelled, could do it if they were skilled with water spirit arts.

That was why, though he thought that it was okay if it was only that much, Rio was a little nervous that he might be overdoing it.

In that regard, Rio made a mistake in making a comparison by comparing the

Seirei no Tami, who had higher aptitude with spirit arts, with humans.

「Well then, Komomo-san. Should we start now」

Rio immediately went towards the center of the dojo before he received further questions.

「Yes!」

Komomo chased after him excitedly.

When she stood at the center of the dojo, her spirits calmed down, and she showed a dignified look on her face.

Then, she gripping her wooden sword with both hands and set a middle stance^[10].

Rio looked with admiration to Komomo, whose atmosphere completely changed.

The match begin immediately after that, Rio kept becoming Komomo's training partner until she was satisfied.

Komomo boldly attacking, and he skillfully handle those by using the gaps to guide her, and lead her to use gap for a big counter.

「Haa、Haa.....」

After exchanging blows for around 10 minutes, being out of breath, with a “plop” sound, Komomo sat on the ground, as if collapsed.

Despite being tired, her expression showed that she was satisfied.

Usually she could only gain experience by sparring against her family, she was extremely satisfied from the bottom of her heart.

I can still move, I can become stronger.

She was looking with admiration, as if being captivated by Rio's dazzling figure, who was standing in front of her, without showing any sign that he was out of breath, at all.



[1] [TL : Fierce God]

[2] [TL* : Match of thousand, army of thousand in one, a man who've power rivaling thousand soldier]

[3] [TL** : Fierce God]

[4] [TL* : The raw said “Homura and Kayoko”, but I think it's a typo as Kayoko is Gouki wife, so I replace it with Shizuku]

[5] [TL* : around 180 cm, in Seirei no Tami Arc[Arc II] Rio's latest height is around 175 cm or ~ 6 feet]

[6] [TL : Just imagine it as big as Sanzenin Nagi residence from Hayate Gotoku[She have a lake inside of her residence complex]]

[7] [TL : Otherwise known as LOLI, it's just the author's ways to smoothing the word [the author is a woman[maybe]]]

[8] [TL : Miko clothes are hakama and dougi]

[9] [TL : Rio received that technique head on, it's different from retreating]

since retreat means getting out of firing zone]

[\[10\]](#) [TL : The raw said “正眼で構える”->set her sword aiming at eyes. thus I take it as middle stance[standard stance] in kendo where the sword gripped with both hands and the tip aligned with eyes]

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Part 1

Rio was meeting in secret with the royal couple, once again, the next day after the match with Gouki.

「I heard the story. You beat Gouki, huh. There's nothing I can say except, magnificent」

The first sentence that came from Homura was praise and admiration of Rio.

Before the secret meeting, Homura had already heard about the results of their match from Gouki.

Gouki, who was a famous swordsman within the kingdom, was beaten by a youth who was still 14 years old.

Even though he thought that was a joke at first, Homura was the one who knew best that Gouki wasn't the kind of person who would tell such jokes.

Though he needed a little time before he decided to accept that fact, just like that, he calmed himself during the time before the secret meeting with Rio.

「That's wonderful, Rio. To the point that you can beat *that* Gouki」

Shizuku praised Rio with a sincere smile, without any ill-will behind it.

Different from Homura, whose praise was mixed with bewilderment, Shizuku was truly happy for Rio's victory.

「Thank you very much」

Rio nodded his head awkwardly as he felt strangely uneasy, due to Shizuku's wholehearted praise.

「Though I planned to have you to train under Gouki, it seems that you've no need for that」

Homura said that with somehow a lonely smile.

As Homura's intention was to have Rio learning under Gouki, in that case, it would be necessary for him to live in the royal capital, and with that, he secretly planned to increase their secret meetings with Rio.

Since they couldn't disclose Rio's parentage, due to various reasons, and excessive contact with Rio had to be refrained, even so, there was still a feeling of wanting to meet with Rio.

Though it was regrettable, it might be for the best, so Homura forcefully suppressed his own feelings.

「That's not true, I also gained a precious experience. Since I had never had a chance to go against someone like Gouki-dono. I'm truly grateful for your consideration」

Maybe because he was aware of Homura's sentiment, Rio said his gratitude and bowed his head to Homura.

Though those words could be mistaken as sarcasm in some cases, a deep sense of gratitude could be felt from his tone.

「That's That's right」

Like groaning, Homura's agreed to one part of Rio's words.

Though in one part he blessed the match with someone at Gouki's level, there was some kind of indescribable feeling hided in Homura's words.

There was no samurai stronger than Gouki in the kingdom.

And probably not even one even if he looked in the neighbouring kingdom.

Despite that Rio, was said to be even stronger than *that* Gouki.

Though without that much ability he otherwise might not have been able to do a journey from the Strahl region to the Yagumo region alone, thus it couldn't be helped that Homura felt in awe of Rio, who prepared himself with that level of skill at his age.

It might be that just showed how frighteningly talented he was, or how much bloody carnage he had experienced, to become that strong.

Though if there weren't such complex circumstances surrounding Rio, it wouldn't even strange if he was thinking of letting Rio take over the kingdom.

Realizing that he was unintentionally making the face of the king, Homura couldn't help but smile wryly.

「By the way Rio, how long are you planning on staying in this kingdom ? 」

To stop his train of thought as a king, thought a little unnatural, Homura suddenly changed the subject.

Though he already heard Rio's circumstances yesterday, due to various circumstances, the atmosphere prevented him to asking and their time was limited.

Though he wanted to switch his train of thought, the topic he asked had not changed.

「I think I'll be staying in this kingdom till around autumn next year」

Rio replied smoothly to Homura's question.

The agricultural reform that he proposed and was in the middle of developing hadn't ended yet.

Rio was thinking of staying in the village till the next harvest, to make sure of the results.

「Ho~h. Your stay is longer than my predictions」

「Yes. Because I need to help around the village」

「Fu, I see You're right 」

The complicated expression instantly gone from Homura face when he imagining the figure of Rio working along the commoners.

It was a fact that Rio was an unofficial royalty, even if the current Rio was never treated as royalty in public and maybe in the future too, it was only natural that Rio was living without understanding the common sense of royalty.

Rio and Homura lived in different worlds.

Even Homura naturally understood that fact.

But, until he heard Rio lifestyle for himself, Homura was under the impression that Rio was living in the same world as him, deep inside his mind.

Even though he heard Rio's cruel past, he never thought that Rio's life wasn't lively up until then.

That then become Homura's secret wish for Rio; it was his shallow thoughts.

Homura showed a bitter expression, as if being ashamed at his shallow thoughts.

「Just sometimes is okay. Just like this one, won't you come to the royal palace and chat with us? 」

He understood that they would become a nuisance to Rio's everyday life by summoning him like that.

Even though they were unable to suppress their feelings of wanting to meet Rio again like that.

He wanted to converse with Rio just like then, even a little bit more, before he left the kingdom.

Even if it was for his own selfishness.

「That's alright. If you're okay with me being in this place.」

Rio answered moderately, without even being aware of Homura's inner feelings.

'Even if I can't give a guarantee to that promise', most of him thought that way.

「I see. Thank you very much」

Despite it being an unofficial place, and even more so, forgetting his status as king, Homura bowed his head to Rio.

Shizuku, who sat next to him, also bowed her head to Rio.

「Please lift your head」

Looking at them like that, Rio quickly asked them to lift their heads.

A royalty shouldn't easily bow their heads, just like that.

Though there were some exceptions, Rio believed that it wasn't the time for that.

「It's nothing, since it won't change the fact that we are taking your time just to meet us, for our own selfishness. We might only bring more and more

trouble to you 』

「That's not true」

Rio plainly denied Homura, who was speaking with an apologetic tone.

「If I really didn't want to meet the both of you, I'd just plainly reject coming to this place」

Sure, it was hard to just refuse Gouki and the other's atmosphere, who came to summon him to this place.

But, he truly never even thought of refusing to coming to that place since the very beginning.

Rio came to that place on his own volition.

「Despite that I can barely feel anything, since the feeling of meeting my family felt a little strange to me, I still came to this place」

Part 2

Rio continued to talk, though he felt a little embarrassed.

「Though I'll leave this kingdom soon, I also feel the warm intimate feeling as family member, even after this」

There was no doubt that he loved his grandparents, whether it was Yuba, Shizuku, or Homura.

They were people who had a good relationship with him.

And then, he wanted to ask for stories of his parent, which were unknown to him.

That kind of thinking wasn't that strange, right.

「Rio」

Shizuku called Rio's name, as if being overcome by her emotions.

「Let's deepen our intimacy even if it's just a little 」

Even Homura said that with a wide smile on his face.

A deadly silence descended into that room.

They couldn't even find a way to break that unpleasant silence.

Opening the conversation bit by bit, somehow created a nice atmosphere between them and before long they were able to chat normally.

The subject of conversation centered around the happy episodes of Zen and Ayame and their common points for each other.

In that place and moment, it was forbidding of a boorish topic such as revenge.

By no means were they wanting to talk about such a gloomy topic.

Just like that, the three of them continued their conversation to their hearts' content.

「Though there's not that much time left, can I ask about something?」

That warmhearted time couldn't last forever; in the blink of an eye, the time for their secret meeting had come to end.

After that conversation, Rio was planned to stay for one more night in Gouki's house and departing back to the village the next day.

Later, though they exchanged a promise to meet again later, a concrete date hadn't yet been decided, it would only be decided when Gouki came to the village as their messenger.

Without knowing whether they could meet again later, they had to say something that they wanted to say right then in that place.

「Currently I'm living with a girl who is the daughter of my uncle in the village. Is it okay to tell her about my identity? 」

Rio asked for permission to tell Ruri about his identity.

Though increasing the number of people who know about Rio's identity wasn't a desirable option, he wanted to tell Ruri about his relationship with Ruri.

Though he knew he had kinship with Ruri, Ruri wasn't aware about that fact.

Despite that, Ruri still treated him as if he was her own family.

He felt guilty for deceiving her by always hiding the truth.

Though it was difficult to control how much information he could tell her, since it would only spark more of her curiosity by telling half-baked information, in that case it would be better to tell her the whole truth.

Of course, there was a little risk that would come along when he told her such information, it wouldn't be a problem as long as Ruri keep silent with that information.

「Fumu. A cousin, huh. It's okay as long as she can keep that secret. I place my trust in your judgement」

Despite showing a gesture of pondering about it for a while, Homura easily granted his permission.

It showed how much he trusted Rio.

「Thank you very much」

The next day, after accompanying Komomo with her training, and a simple match with Hayate, Rio departed from Gouki's house and was seen off by the Saga family.

Even if that distance usually took around half a day under normal circumstances, in case of Rio, he arrived in the village just by running for less than an hour.

When he returned to the village, the villagers greeted him with 「Okaeri [Welcome back]」 and he also returned their greeting.

「Welcome back, Rio」

When he entered the house that he was already getting used to, Yuba, who sat on the mat of the hallway, greeted him with a bright smile.

「Yeah, I've returned」

Even Rio unintentionally showed a happy smile, on seeing her smile, which was no different from before he went to the royal capital.

「It seems you already know the whole story」

「Yes」

「Should I change my tone when it's just the two of us ? 」

「Anything but that, please」

Rio refused with a bitter smile when Yuba told such a joke.

The Yuba let out a dry laugh.

「Even if Rio is royalty, you and I are grandchild and grandmother. That's what I always believed. You may keep this relationship for as long as you want to」

「..... Thank you very much」

After he nodded with a tender smile, he sat in front of Yuba.

「I received permission to tell my identity to Ruri-san. Is it alright to tell her that story ? 」

When they conversed as a replacement for their greeting, Rio suddenly

brought up that topic while looking at Yuba with an earnest expression.

Yuba took a small, deep breath as she heard that topic, while catching a glimpse of Rio's sincerity in his eyes.

「She's your blood relative. Seeing that you're living under the same roof like this, she has the right to know. I'll support your decision」

Yuba answered calmly after pausing for a few seconds.

Both of them looked into the other's eyes.

「Where is Ruri-san right now ? 」

「She might be drinking tea with the other village girls. She might come back soon if she heard the news about your returning from the villagers」

It was after the harvest time finished, the villagers found that they had too much free time.

With basically almost nothing to do, aside from work in the village, there was nothing else to do, except for gossiping amongst the fellow villagers, when they lost that work.

Ruri, who had no work in the last few days, was chatting amongst the fellow village girls, in the same age group, since the time increased.

「I'm Home～ ! Welcome home, Rio! 」

Speaking of the devil, true enough Ruri came back before long.

When she instantly confirmed that Rio had come back, she addressed Rio with a smile like a blooming flower.

It was a little amusing that she was welcoming Rio while she was the one who came back, so Rio chuckled when he heard that.

「Yes. I've returned, Ruri-san」

「uhm! I was just surprised at how you just suddenly went to the royal capital. Obaachan wouldn't tell me even when I asked her」



Part 3

Ruri shrugged her shoulder, as if feeling dissatisfied at the fact that she'd been kept in the dark.

Though she didn't straightly ask what happened, it still made her feel worried.

「As a matter of fact, I just wanted to tell you about that matter. But, I have to ask you to keep the contents of my story as a secret and never divulge it to anyone」

Rio told her about his requirement while showing a little apologetic face.

「U~hn, why? 」

Ruri asked while tilting her neck, being confused by that vague explanation.

「The subject I'm about to tell you is the main reason why I'm staying in this house. And I can't tell you any further without a promise from you to protect this secret」

Since he was unable to tell her about the recent events, he had no choice but to speak in a profound way*.

He had to make sure of Ruri's answer. Rio was looking at her face.

「..... Understood. I promise」

Ruri give her answer with a calm and profound tone.

After catching that sincere look on her, Rio decided to tell her the truth.

Rio narrated the circumstances that caused all the events in order, one by one.

「E? EH? Rio is my cousin, but his mother is a royalty, EH, EEEE~~~H! ? 」

When he told her the fact that his mother was royalty, Ruri's face was exactly like a pigeon who had been shot with peashooter. [TL : dumbfounded with her eyelids opened very wide]

「E~hm,it's just a joke or something, right? 」

As if she wanted to make sure of that, Ruri asked with a timid voice.

「It's the truth. Rio's father your uncle was tied by marriage with the princess of this kingdom」

Yuba gave a testimony regarding the truth of Rio's story with an earnest expression.

She could judge from Yuba's expression that she didn't lie.

Then looking back and forth from Rio to Yuba's faces so many times.

「E-Eh~m, Ri-Rio Sama, MY DEEPEST APOLOGY ! SORRY FOR MY MANY IMPOLITENESS TILL NOW! 」

Ruri prostrated before Rio as if being confused with the sudden change in events.

She was thinking back on how she was being overly familiar in her actions towards Rio; when she thought about that, she was extremely rude towards him.

「Please stop with that. Please interact with me like usual! 」

Rio said that with a flustered tone, as if trying to stop Ruri who was acting that way.

「B-But Rio-sama is a royalty, right ? 」

「My circumstances can't be known by the public. Something like royalty is nothing more than an unofficial fact, I've never even considered myself as royalty」

Rio said that while smiling wryly to Ruri, who acted timidly in front of Rio.

「That's why, please. Please just treat me like usual」

Rio face, that reflected into her eyes, was smiling wryly, as if feeling extreme discomfort. When Ruri said her true feelings to Rio, it was decided from the way she associated with him until then*. [TLC* : 非常に居心地の悪そうな苦笑を浮かべるリオの顔が視界に映り、ルリはリオが本心からそう思って口に出しているのだと、これまでの付き合いから判断した。]

That's right.

Rio was someone who could handle everything flawlessly, but he never acted

haughty due to his talent.

Even if now he suddenly said that he was royalty, Ruri knew very well that he was not the kind of stinky man who would change just because of that.

「U-Understood 」

With that, Ruri gave her consent.

Though her voice was still strained.

In the depths of her mind, she was still nervous.

「Your tone is stiff, you know?」

Rio pointed that fact, as if to make fun of her.

「AH, HA, Uhm」

Though she almost unintentionally answered with stiff tone, she somehow gave up and nodded her head while showing an awkward smile.

「Though it's caused a big change when I just suddenly became your cousin, please treat me well, from now on」

Rio bowed his head as if to renew their relationship as cousins.

But, his face was smiling ear to ear.

「AH, U~hn. I see Me and Rio are cousins」

Ruri bowed her head and blinked her eyes in puzzlement once she raised her head.

The overwhelmingly shocking truth, about the fact that Rio was a royalty all along, made Ruri completely forget the fact that he was her cousin.

In the first place, Rio just wanted to convey his circumstances to tell her the fact that he was actually her cousin.

Though he already expected it, Ruri's reaction to that truth was completely reversed. [TL : She should be shocked to the fact that he was her cousin first, then shocked to the fact that he was royalty. In this case, it's the backwards]

「I see, a family other than Obaachan AH, since I'm the older one, then I'm the onee-chan, right」

After she gradually understood what that fact meant, Ruri smiled happily as if being delighted.

「AH, sorry ! Eh~m, in this case I should say please treat me well, too! 」

Maybe because she was thinking too many things at once, she showed a little loose smile, Ruri noticed the comical glance that came from Rio.

When she regained her calmness, Ruri bowed to Rio in panic with a little flustered voice.

「..... Ah, even so, I want Rio to call me “Onee-chan” even just once. Is that okay? 」

Maybe because something was struck her head, when she raised her head, she looked at Rio with an earnest expression.

「Yes. If you’re okay with it? 」

Rio also looked at Ruri with an earnest expression.

Catching that line of sight and for some reason making a little theatrical-like cough, then she opened her mouth as if make up her mind.

「I’m not happy with that tone. Though I was being cautious when we first met, there was no need to speak using polite tone that you’ve been using up until now. Though I want you to be more intimate, since we’re cousins」

With a somehow dissatisfied tone, Ruri told him that while pouting a little.

「Ehm, that’s already my habit, even before I came here. For once, there’s no big reason for using such manners when speaking to someone, or speaking that way is 」 [TLC：一度、こういう口調で接した相手にはよほどの理由がないと、口調を戻すのに戸惑ってしまうというか.....]

Part 4

Rio explained his reason with bitter smile, as if being embarrassed by it.

Though it didn't mean that he was a poor speaker, the way he spoke using polite language had already become Rio's habit.

As long as the other party wasn't an arrogant person or a kid, Rio would experience difficulties if he was talking to them in overly familiar manner.

Though if he was speaking in informal way, he would often stumble with his words, in any case he would only feel unstoppable awkwardness. He kept it in his mind that it would be hard to get the momentum by doing that.

「Isn't that even a bigger reason for us, I mean, you're my younger male cousin ? 」

Ruri was staring with a scorning look at Rio, as she was unable to agree with Rio's reasoning.

The time she passed and the kindness received from Rio wasn't small, she even received a lot of favours.

In addition, wasn't he also her own male younger cousin.

And yet, Ruri felt lonely, as Rio was talking with such stiff tone.

When he caught Ruri's sullen look, Rio immediately felt ashamed, seeing her expression as if she become a little senile.

「..... Sorry. You're right. I'll talk without formal tones to Ruri starting from now. Is it okay that way? 」

Rio said that while blushing shyly.

Though he felt somehow itchy speaking that way, Ruri was happy with that.

「uhm! 」

Ruri looked delighted while nodding vigorously.

Translator : Cnine

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Part 1

Winter ended, and spring came.

The establishment of the canal and waterwheel for drawing water was already completed; the water wheel poured water into the canal which went on towards the village, as much as needed.

Just like that, the scenery of the waterwheel drawing the water then pouring it to the canal, at first, made the villagers astonished.

But, they immediately got used to that convenience and it was an indispensable existence for their farm-work.

Along with the completion of soil reform, Rio was sowing the seeds for that year's harvest with several villagers.

「Rio~. I've scattered the seeds at my designated area~」

「Thank you very much. Then, could you please help the people who have yet to finish their designated area?」

「OKAY ! 」

Their conversation resounded around them, since they were separated by a little distance between each other.

After Rio revealed his relationship with Ruri, their relationship became more intimate than before.

Though she was already a sociable girl by nature, because Rio change the way he talked when he was with Ruri, it was as if they're becoming more intimate compared to before.

Though the other girls asked Ruri the reason for Rio's change in the way he spoke with Ruri, as if competing the others, she was unable to tell them the true reason and had no choice but to say an appropriate evasive reply.

After all, Ruri just said「Since we're living under the same roof, I just want you to please stop being so formal since it'll tire me out 」

Though pretty much that reason wasn't even without concern, more and

more people were suspicious that their reason might have to do with a relationship between man and woman.

Due to the change in the relationship between those two, even most of the girls who were secretly aiming for Rio up till then were completely withdrawing from the competition.

(Those two, I wonder if they're dating)

But, there was a girl who had yet to give up.

Her name was Sayo.

Though she was trying to help Rio, she was anxious when she noticed Rio and the others.

Though Sayo estimated that Ruri wasn't aiming at Rio, she might need to stop that kind of thought and reconsider their relationship, when seeing their intimacy.

Or not, she felt strong if she thought that way.

Though she didn't know what she had to say, somehow her chest felt gloomy when she looked at them chatting happily. [TL : YANDERE POTENTIAL FOUND! X 3]

The way Rio spoke to Ruri, showing an unsurpassable wall for the other village girls, it couldn't be helped that Sayo felt anxious due to that.

「Should I help you plant the seeds, Sayo-san ? 」

When she absent-mindedly thought like that about Rio, shortly after that, the real person addressed Sayo.

「E-AH, Rio-sama ! S-Sorry! I just lost in my thought! 」

Rio who offered his assistance made Sayo return from her delusions.

When looking at their surroundings, the fact that Sayo's pace was the slowest one was very conspicuous.

When she noticing that, Sayo white sunburnt face flushed red.

「Please remember it properly. Since the one who'll teach everyone in the village this way of sowing the seeds is Sayo-san after I'm no longer in the

village」

Rio said that to Sayo who was seemingly unable to properly remember the precise method.

「Eh ? 」

As if a thunderbolt struck out of nowhere in the middle of day, blood drained from Sayo's face.

「U-Uhm ! Rio-sama! When will you leave this village? 」

The flustered Sayo asked Rio, who was already sowing the seeds.

Rio would leave the village.

Come to think of it, she suddenly remember hearing such things when Rio had just arrived in the village.

But, Sayo had completely forgotten the fact that Rio would leave the village.

「Yes. I'll leave this village around next autumn」

Rio answered from a place a little away from her.

Though that smile somehow felt lonely, she couldn't sense any hesitation in Rio's will to leave the village.

「Next, Autumn right. It's not that long」

Sayo said those words with a weak tone as Rio's strong will was transmitted to her.

「Is there something wrong ? 」

Missing Sayo's answer just then, Rio asked her with a curious expression.

「Ah, it's nothing ! There's nothing wrong! 」

As if being flustered, Sayo shook her head.

Most likely she suddenly became depressed.

But, there was no way she could cause trouble for Rio, more than already, so Sayo immersed herself with her own work.

Since she might start crying right away if she didn't do that.

「Thank you everyone ! Thanks to all of you, I can finish the planned works by today. Please don't forget about the method of sowing the seeds that I told you today, and use it starting from next year」

After the works that day were done, and he taught most of what he should teach them, Rio declared that their work for the day was done.

While taking the opportunity, Rio also told the villagers that he would leave the village the next autumn.

Though he already said that the first time he came to the village, he intended to tell them about that once again, in that place, with the intention of motivating them to learn the knowledge.

None of the villagers now doubted Rio's knowledge, after his achievement with canal and waterwheel.

Rio's existence had already become completely natural to them; though the villagers were shocked, no one showed a loss of composure.

It was already the evening, the villagers were dispersing from that place.

「Rio ! Thank you for the hard wo~rk. Shall we go home? 」

Rio and Ruri were going back to the house they were living in together, as if it was something natural for them.

Sayo's house was in the opposite direction.

She was unable to ask him to go home together as it would look unnatural.

It couldn't be helped that Sayo was envious of Ruri.

「Okey. Thanks for the hard work. I wonder, what do you want for today's dinner? 」

「Ah, then I want to eat Zousui* with leftover vegetables」 [TL* : Rice gruel containing vegetable, meat, fish, etc..... seasoned with miso or soy sauce]

Sayo was looking at them chatting happily from behind with a dumbfounded expression.

She vaguely felt suspicious of their conversation, which was completely like a married couple.

Before long Sayo walked back towards her house with a dejected figure.

Seeing that strangely gloomy atmosphere, the villagers she met along the way were hesitant to greet her; all of them.

「.....!!!」

Part 2

When she arrived, her knees become limp; Sayo sat down in the entryway.

Just like that, she was crying, her tears gushed out like a broken dam.

「I'm ho..... O-Oi, Sayo ! 」

In that place, Shin, who just arrived, looked at her crying figure.

Though he called to her in a panic, Sayo didn't raise her face.

The villagers who happen to pass in front of the entryway recalled Sayo saying something strange in that state, and rushed in panic.

「What's the matter ? Has something happened? 」

Sayo gave a weak reaction.

Shin desperately thought about the reason for her to become like that.

「Is it him?」

Shin knew that there was only one person who could cause Sayo to become like that.

Though there might be another reason, he could think of only one person who could cause Sayo's emotions to change that far.

「Did that bastard Rio do something?」

Sayo was looking at her important hairpin, that she got from Rio. She talked happily about the gift she got from Rio, in the house.

After their parents' death, she was trying her best in front of him; looking at what had happened recently, her child-like smile had decreased.

That was why Shin was convinced that the one who made Sayo cry was Rio.
[TL : You're the culprit[Conan style]]

「T-That's no Rio-sama isn't at fault 」

When Shin's voice, which was filled with anger, reached Sayo's ears, she quickly told him that.

But she couldn't voice her words very well, due to her crying.

After Shin looked at the state of his sister, it was only fuelled his anger even further.

「That bastard, as I thought, it's better if he never came to this village」

While saying that, Shin felt a strong sense of antipathy.

The livelihood of the village was obviously improving thanks to Rio's arrival.

If Rio hadn't come, Ruri might have experienced a cruel experience at Gon's hands.

Rio was that kind of existence in his heart.

But, when he looked at his little sister crying in front of him, he couldn't help but think that it would be better if he had never come to the village.

Because at least his little sister wouldn't cry.

「No, that's not it, Rio-sama said that he'll leave the village, and then」

Sayo explained that it's not Rio's fault.

But Shin probably would take it as Rio's fault, even if she explained it frankly to him.

「You're mistaken, this has nothing to do with Rio-sama 」

When she noticed that it had the opposite effect to what she hoped for, Sayo corrected him by saying that Rio really didn't have anything to do with it.

But, it was already too late.

「That guy will, leave from the village That's 」

Shin then knew the reason why his sister was crying like that.

His expression was as if he was chewing a bitter bug.

The truth was, Shin also knew that Rio would leave the village sooner or later.

Though he completely forgot about that, as he became more familiar within the village lately; it was something that he knew since the first time Rio arrived in the village.

At first, Shin unable to come to like Rio, and yet, despite being just a temporary resident, the villagers carelessly accepted him; the last line was him getting intimate with Ruri.

「.....」

Shin fell deeply into his own thoughts.

About what he should do.

About what he should do to stop Sayo from crying.

But, Shin was the one who knew the most that he wasn't someone who was suited for that kind of thing.

He was getting more irritated when thinking about it. The next moment, he ran from that place.

He decided to act on his instincts, rather than pondering about it.

「O-Oniichan ! W-Wait! 」

Though he heard Sayo's voice, who was trying to hold him back from behind, Shin kept running with all his power and neglected her plea.

Just like that, soon he arrived at Yuba's house.

「Oi, Rio ! 」

Changing his expression, then opening the door of the house, he called Rio's name.

Rio, Yuba, and Ruri, who were in the middle of preparing for dinner in the hall, were astonished on seeing him like that.

「Do you have some business with Rio ? 」

Several seconds later, Yuba asked his business with a quizzical voice.

Though it was completely a rare occurrence for Shin to have some business with Rio, from the frantic look and his vigour, it was seemingly not a trivial matter.

Just what kind of business did he have with Rio.

「Please ! Please don't leave this village! 」

After saying that, Shin prostrated before him.

「Wha-.....」

The other three were speechless.

「I know that I'm being selfish by saying this ! But, please hear what I'm saying without saying anything. Will you stay in the village, even after this! 」

Sayo was crying.

Shin keep pleading to Rio, saying the words that he couldn't say.

When Rio and the others were astounded without being able to say anything — .

「O-Oniichan ! S-Sorry! My brother has troubled you 」

Sayo, who just came, gasped for breath in that place.

When the figure of Shin prostrating come into her eyes,she quickly called for him.

「See, onii-chan. You're causing trouble to them. See, right? 」

She then pulled Shin's body.

He cast a fleeting glance at his little sister, who was trying hard to put a smile on her face.

There were traces of tears in the corners of her eyes.

Though her lips slightly opened, Shin, who could feel her desperation, raised his powerless body.

「Y-Yeah My bad」

Losing his previous vigour, Shin apologised with dumbfounded face.

Part 3

「I'm really sorry ! I'll have a proper talk with my brother! 」

Sayo bowed her head deeply.

As if feeling uncomfortable by her actions, Shin also bowed together at her side.

It was just the usual habit of Shin, doing something without thinking of the consequences when he lost his cool.

He didn't know how many times he brought such troubles to Sayo.

Shin would feel really awkward after what he did.

「..... Understood. We didn't hear anything about what happened just now. Right, Rio? 」

Yuba knew very well regarding the crazy actions which were repeatable done by Shin.

She also understood what sort of reasons for whenever he does that kind of action.

Giving a sidelong glance at Ruri and Rio, who were still speechless at the actions of the pair of siblings, Yuba asked Rio while letting out a small sigh.

「Yes. I don't mind 」

Dumbfoundedly looking at the pair of siblings, who were bowing to him, Rio agreed with Yuba, while somehow feeling that he should quickly flee from that place.

To be frank, Rio was also a little lost to what just happened before him.

It seemed the turning point was when he told the time he would leave to the villagers.

Moreover, the way Shin tried to restrain him from leaving the village dealt a huge shock to him.

If there was nothing between them, it might pose no problem to ask further.

Being unable to give him an answer when they were in that place, Rio was

taken in by Yuba's proposal.

「Thank you very much ! 」

After receiving their approval, Shin said his gratitude again. Just like that, Shin returned back to his house while being dragged by Sayo.

「By the way, should we have dinner first?」

Yuba said that while sighed deeply, looking at their retreating backs.

Along with Rio and Ruri, they timidly begin their dinner.

For some reason their dinner was enveloped by an awkward atmosphere, they didn't discuss anything regarding Shin's action.

「Rio, I'll ask something, will you lend your ears for a while ? 」

After the dinner and they done with tidying up the aftermath, Rio was asked by Yuba.

「Yes, is there some problem ? 」

「Is it okay to ask what you are trying to do, after you leave this village ? 」

The matter regarding Rio leaving the village, though she already heard it since the first time he starting his staying in this village, she didn't pry too deeply into the reason for that.

Somehow she felt awkward and didn't pry further but there was the event caused by Shin.

Though Yuba slightly guessed one reason for Rio to leave the village, she thought that there were several other reason for that, by looking at Rio's state.

Thus Yuba decided to ask further.

Ruri, who heard from their side, was looking intently at Rio.

「After I leave the village 」

When Rio answered that question, he paused for a moment.

After he left the village, he would go back to Strahl region, but it seemed that he needed to go to Seirei no Tami first.

He would then collect information about Lucius after returning to the Strahl

region.

And then, he also needed to report about his safety to his teacher, Seria.

He only sent a letter, under an alias, to Seria once before, and didn't have any contact with her after that. [ED : It was the one thing she asked, you jerk!!!][TL : Cool Senji-san, COOL]

Though he couldn't get along with the nobles of the Bertram kingdom, only Seria was different.

Currently, though he don't know how much regarding his treatment* within the Bertram kingdom, if it was the current him, he could hide himself as much as he wanted. [TL* : Rio is charged with false charge and become a fugitive by the end of 1st Act]

It might be better if he sneaked into Bertram kingdom and meet Seria.

「Though we are not connected by blood, there is a child who regards me as her own brother. I'm going to meet that child. After that, since there's a benefactor on the other side[Strahl region], I should show my face to them too.」

「Hee, there's such child, huh」

Yuba spoke with great interest on hearing the existence of the people who were close to Rio.

Ruri brought herself closer since she was also interested.

「Yes. My little sister is 12 years old now. My benefactor is supposedly around 20 years old」

「Fumu, they're still young, I see」

She felt assured, since to Rio those kinds of people are kind ones.

Even though she couldn't confirm that by meet them directly.

「Will you come back to this village someday ? 」

「That's right. Though I don't know when that'll be, I definitely will return to this village」

Though It was not something that he can use frequently, he could shorten the

movement time with a transfer crystal; Rio could come, like an excursion, to the Yagumo region from the Strahl region.

He was tied in various ways, so he thought that he wanted to return to that place after finishing his errands.

「I see. You can come back any time. I mean, you're already recognised as one of villagers」

「.....Yes. Thank you very much」

Rio told his gratitude with a shy face, to Yuba who was smiling gently at him.

Yuba gave a faint, lonely smile to Rio, who was smiling in such way.

「And then, the matter regarding Shin's action just now. I vaguely understand the reason why Shin took such actions towards you but 」

「Aa, Un. I have a feeling that I'm also somehow related to that」 [TL ; What a scary intuition, Ruri]

Smiling wryly, Ruri agreed with Yuba statement, while sending a fleeting glance at Rio.

Rio tilted his head as he didn't quite understand the meaning behind their actions. [TL : F#ck you, now you're acting like some donkan protagonist]

They were smiling wryly on seeing Rio's reaction.

「Let me tell them indirectly the next time. The two of you, will you just act like usual and didn't pry too deeply into this? 」

「U~hn. As for me, I occasionally chat for a while with Sayo but I'll leave it to you first, Obaa-chan」

Since she knew that it was not a good idea for many person to hear the reason at the same time, Ruri was aware that, though she showed a small reluctant expression.

「Yeah, understood」

Though he was still a bit puzzled, Rio gave his consent, and then they immediately split up.

TL : Cnine

ED : SenjiQ

PF : Jake1456

Part 1

Just before the summer, Rio secretly met with the king and the queen.

Currently Rio was telling them how the agricultural reform that he was implementing in the village had begun to show results.

The agricultural land developed by Rio was showing many obvious forms of evidence that it would yield a much better harvest compared to the other land, and was rich with grains.

That difference was completely obvious. The villagers danced wildly while giving their gratitude to Rio. They then unanimously decided that they would start adopting the agriculture following Rio's methods.

When hearing such a detailed story, Homura showed a deep interest in it.

Since the very beginning, Rio told that kind of story for the sake of baiting Homura's curiosity, so that was according to his plan.

Rio did that to avoid gathering too much attention to the village by immediately spreading the technology. He considered that way to be the safest way to spread the technology.

By making Homura, the king, participate in it, he estimated that the plan would become a great achievement.

Rio explained everything, starting from the shape of the farming tools to the method of sowing the seeds, soil improvement[soil reform], the water wheel for drawing water, the creation of canal, *etc.*

Homura listened to his explanation with a serious expression. Even Gouki and Shizuku on the side were showing expressions of interest on their faces regarding that topic.

Homura was particularly interested at the water wheel for drawing water.

「I was able to hear a very interesting topic.」

Homura said that after talking for nearly one hour about it. He was really interested in it.

「Gouki, doesn't that kind of method need an on-site survey immediately? If it turns out well, I think I'll implement it within the kingdom starting next year.」

If Rio's story were true, they had no choice but to implement that reform.

He left the investigation to his trusted subordinates. In addition, Homura planned to implement that method starting next year if there was a possibility for that.

If it was Gouki, it would also be easier to get Rio's cooperation.

「With pleasure.」

「Uhm, I'll leave it to you. In case it has too many requirements, there's no need to pay too much attention to it.」

The talk regarding that method continued for a while after that.

After the story passed the first stage, Homura winked to Gouki and Kayoko.

Afterwards, the Saga couple responded with their line of sight —.

「Well then, Rio — 」

With a somehow humble expression, as if being affected by it, Homura spoke to Rio.

「We have something important to tell you today.」[TL : I have bad feeling about this[But my feminist side somehow boiling in excitement]]

「Something important?」

Rio asked with a puzzled tone.

An unusual atmosphere exuded from Homura.

Rio straightened his back to accept anything that would come head-on.

「Ah. It's related to your revenge.」

“Prick,” Rio's eyebrows twitched.

They had never talked regarding the topic of his revenge so far. It somehow became their mutual silent agreement.

It was a very sensitive topic. Even if it was accidentally unfolded in the conversation, it would only cause more resentment.

「What kind of matter?」

As long as that kind of topic surfaced, was there something else to talk about except for his pent-up resentment?

Rio looked at Homura who straightened his back a little.

「Uhm」

Homura peered deep into Rio's eyes, who asked that question.

The yellowish brown pupils were gazing straight to reality.

They had no hesitation or indecision.

When looking at such good eyes, Homura wondered about the innumerable number of people that come into contact with it.

「..... I also hate that man called Lucius. The truth is, I really want to help you with my own hands. But unfortunately I can't leave this kingdom」

「That's only natural 」

Though he had yet to understand Homura's real intentions, Rio said the most appropriate words.

Since Homura was the ruler of this kingdom.

And for such a man, even if his daughter was murdered, it was only a matter of fact that he was unable to avenge her death by going to a faraway land and leaving his kingdom behind.

「That's why, though it's just few, I can at least lend my vassals to you. They'll assist you instead of Shizuku and me[washi]. You can use them as much as you like」

「Hah, EH.....?」

Being bombarded by surprise after surprise, Rio unintentionally stiffened.

It just came out of nowhere.

Homura was a little amused when he looked at Rio's dumbfounded expression.

「N-No, but, doing something like that is 」

Though his mind finally caught up to the situation, even so, Rio was still perplexed.

The words that were just spoken by Homura reverberated in Rio's ears.

It seemed he really mean it when he said those words.

Or his ears might just be mistaking something.

「I'll give 10 of my vassals to you. All of them are the ones you met back in the village when you met Gouki for the first time」

At that time, there were exactly 10 people, including Gouki and Kayoko.

「Don't tell me Gouki-dono and Kayoko-dono too?」

Rio was speechless due to that absurdity.

Part 2

「That's right. These two already gave their own volition to come too」

Homura answered with a calm tone.

「..... If Gouki-dono went missing from the kingdom, wouldn't that cause no small trouble?」

Gouki was a senior samurai of the kingdom.

With his “Ikkitousen” prowess, along with his faith and achievements that were piling up in the kingdom, undoubtedly if Gouki abandoned all of that it would cause no small trouble to the kingdom by suddenly going missing.

「I've already made arrangements for that situation. I'll slowly spread rumours regarding Gouki's retirement to the whole kingdom. It's nothing strange for someone at his age to retire. As a matter of fact, he was already giving this matter much consideration」

「.....」

Hearing those words, Rio was dumbfounded.

Despite the informal place, the king himself made a very important statement regarding his vassal Gouki, who was also the chief of his vassals.

It seemed they already made the necessary arrangements.

Though he knew about that, Rio had a hard to describe feeling.

「Gouki's-dono son and daughter will come too, right? What about them ? 」

The Saga couple had Hayate and Komomo.

Though he heard they had a second and third son close to Hayate's age, he had never met them.

What would they do about them?

「The ones who'll go are Gouki and Kayoko maybe Komomo will be following too. In that case your fellow travelers would increase to 11 people」

Saying that, Homura was looking at Gouki and Kayoko.

「Yes. Though we'll be taking Komomo along, her siblings will be left behind in this region」

Gouki replied with an unwavering tone.

「Strahl region isn't the kind of place where you can easily come to and leave, you know? It'll take several months of traveling by foot even for someone on Gouki-dono's level」

Since there were some steep terrains along the journey, it would make the movement speed fall if they were travelling by foot, unless they took a detour, which was even more time consuming.

Though it was possible to shorten that time if they were flying with spirit arts, like in Rio's case, it would become a difficult journey if they were only strengthening their physical ability with spirit arts.

Even if they were travelling like that till Strahl region, there was no positive proof that Lucius was still alive.

And yet they said something like following him all the way to that place, which would make it difficult for them to go back to their homes; did they truly understand the meaning of their statements?

Thus Rio was perplexed.

「The position of family head will be handed to Hayate. There's nothing in this kingdom that will hinder me in following Rio-sama」

「No, that's the problem Did you already discuss this matter with Hayate-dono and his brother? 」

Even Hayate and his brother would be shaken if their parents vanished for no reason.

What would they think about Gouki leaving the kingdom.

「They'll become samurai sooner or later. The preparation to be separated with their parents was already done a long time ago. I already explained the truth secretly to Hayate」

「But it'll cause similar problems by accompanying me travelling to other places, right No matter what kind of order it is, being lost on your way to

return to this place, after going to a foreign place is just too much」

「The other people also have no objection to accompany Rio-sama. They have a little special circumstances, each one of them is member of the dark side[anbu]. There's no need to worry that they'll become a hindrance, since they've no family, highest loyalty, and have mastered of full set of skills」

Rio was unable to close his mouth.

While it might be true that they were sons of samurai, how were they allowed to be separated from their parents.

Even if it was painful when they were together, they would feel unsatisfied.

It seemed the king's life was the reason that the retainer was unable to refuse that order.

Even so, there must be some orders that they couldn't follow.

「While that might be true, there's no need to abide such an order, right? Since I'm fine with going alone」

Rio said that as if indirectly trying to refuse that proposal.

「It's great since even I can't forgive that Lucius. Today's matter is mine and Kayoko's personal wish for something we were unable to achieve in the past. There's no doubt that it's our long cherished ambition to follow Rio-sama」

「..... But it doesn't mean the others think that way too, right」

「The other people are the people who are serving the Saga family. Their loyalty is extremely high. They're also more than happy to follow us」

「But」

The Saga couple had already resolved their heart.

Rio was speechless as he didn't know what he should say to them.

「..... As I thought, I can't receive such help. Though I'm happy with your feelings, this is something that I must accomplish by myself」

After a brief silence, he made his resolution; Rio refused their help with a firm tone.

「Mu~, As I thought, it came to this, huh」

Homura said those words while smiling wryly, as he somehow anticipated Rio's refusal for his assistance beforehand.

「But, you see. This is not your problem alone. We're also sharing similar hatred to that Lucius. This is where we should make a distinction. I don't wish for you to carry the burden of revenge by yourself」

「That's.....」

Even if they wanted to bring judgment to Lucius, he didn't know the reason why they so strongly wishing to accompany him.

It was different if they were travelling as a comrade, for Rio was strongly opposed to them following him as his vassal.

He didn't understand what he should do when he suddenly received a pledge of allegiance.

The meaning of those words were also that he would be burdened with the lives of his vassals.

It would only cause many problems, even if they were accompanying him that way.

It would bring a problem to his relationship with the Seirei no Tami if he brought too many humans to their community, and would obstruct his movement speed, compared to when he was travelling alone.

「There's a very great difference between me and Gouki-dono's movement speed. I'm even sure that Gouki-dono wouldn't be able to catch up to my speed」

As he had no choice left, Rio spoke of one of his reasons that he didn't wish for them to accompany him.

「Though I hear from Gouki that you excel at Spirit arts, even so, the ones who will follow you are only consisting of first-rate spirit arts users, even in this kingdom, you know? I don't think that they will be unable to follow」

As he didn't know the means of Rio's movement, Homura spoke as if bewildered.

「It's because I'll be flying in the sky」[TL : Why he didn't say "It's because I'm superman"]

‘When saying that, it couldn't be helped if that person would be deemed as an insane person’ Rio ridiculed himself.

Part 3

「Fly ing?」

Sure enough, Homura showed a dubious expression, as he was unable to measure the meaning of Rio's words.

「It's something like this」

Rio decided to show it to make it easier for them to understand.

The air inside the room rose, and then condensed, as if enclosing Rio's surroundings. Rio's body was floating in the air as if it have buoyancy.

「!!!!!!? 」

Homura and the others looked at that spectacle.

「Though I was just floating right now, with its movement, I can fly quite fast in the sky」

Rio gave his explanation to Homura and the others, who were still dumbfounded.

「Is that spirit arts? Doing something like that is Gouki, do you know someone who can do something like this? 」

Even if he was a spirit user himself, as far as he knew, Homura didn't know anyone who could do something like Rio, so he asked Gouki with a dumbfounded expression.

「..... No one. Though, I can blow my body with a squall. If it comes to floating with stability in the middle of air 」

Gouki also answered with a dumbfounded expression, as he was still unable to take his eyes off of the figure of Rio, who was floating in the air.

As expected, as it needed continuous minute control of Odo, even just by controlling the stability while floating couldn't be done with half-hearted power control.

「By the way, I can move as fast as someone running normally by

strengthening his physical ability with spirit arts, ignoring any kind of obstacle; be it mountain, valley, or forest」

Rio adding such information at the end of his explanation.

Traveling long distance with them would only reduce his own movement speed, as expected, Rio still wanted to decline Homura's offer.

In addition, he also wanted to visit the village of the Seirei no Tami.

He, who was for some reason accepted as their sworn friend, there was a very high possibility that it would turn into an awkward situation if he was being accompanied by Gouki and the others.

Though they might get the permission to enter if Rio requested for it, it would be with a not so nice face.

「Mu~, certainly, it would only become a hindrance if they were travelling along with you 」

Homura placed his hand on his chin, as if pondering deeply about it.

「Okay. I'll stop requesting your permission for that matter more than this for now. But, you must keep this matter in one corner of your head. Since you might change your mind before your departure」

「Understood 」

Rio replied, despite thinking that it might be that he didn't need that.



One week after that, there was Komomo's figure walking next to Rio.

Wearing a purple colored kimono, her happy smile gathered attention inside the village with that cuteness of hers. [TL : YES LOLITA, NO TOUCH!]

Furthermore, next to her was the kingdom's technical officers and Gouki.

Komomo aside, the reason Gouki and the others came to the village was to conduct the site survey of the agricultural reform in the village.

In order to guide Gouki, Rio was explaining the improvement points of the agriculture while they were walking in the village.

「Rio-sama ! It's turning round and round to pick water! This is the water wheel right! 」

When he was guiding Komomo and Gouki to the water wheel, Komomo's eyes were sparkling when she was looking at the water wheel that was drawing water bit by bit.



「That's the water wheel for drawing water. To actually see this kind of

masterpiece」

Even Gouki was dumbfounded on seeing the spectacle of the water being drawn by the water wheel.

The technical officers next to him also starred pop-eyed at the structure.

「The structure isn't particularly that complex. This article is currently running by using the dynamic force of the water flowing in the river to ——」

Thus Rio explained the structure of the water wheel.

Gouki and the others were listening earnestly as to not miss any information from Rio's explanation.

Rio politely answered the questions being asked to him by the technical officers after he was done with his explanation.

After that, Rio guided them to various places in the village, while explaining every work involved in the agricultural reform.

「How's that, can it be implemented?」

「Yes! This is already a technological revolution! Even if it's just the water wheel for drawing water it is enough merit to be deemed as the service for agricultural reform of our kingdom」

The technical officers answered as if being excited by Gouki's question.

They decided to stay in this village for a while to wring out the technology.

「Well then, Rio-sama. I can say that this is worthy of travelling all the way here」

With the technical officers by their side exchanging their opinion about this and that, Gouki addressed Rio.

「Regarding this matter, I didn't wish for it to be conveyed [using my name], can I? I myself didn't really wish to become famous within the kingdom, so I shouldn't do something that will gather too much attention, right?」

They decided during their secret meeting, a few days prior, that the name of the initiator of the technology, and that Rio's wouldn't be published.

They were firmly reminding the technical officers to guard that secret; he

even declined the idea of a fee from Homura.

「Though I agree with you. I also received a strict order to give courteous gratitude from his majesty. I'll bet my life to stop it if there's someone who wants to take advantage of that information to gain something. Isn't it just natural for me to do that ? 」

「Even if you say that 」

「Anything is fine. It's been decided that we won't give it unless it's a treasure」 [TLC* : なければ財宝をお渡しすることになります]

Gouki's tone was firm.

Even if he was somehow evading an answer, it was as if that matter was already dealt with and he had already received the compensation.

Even if he made an excuse in that place, he would bring up a similar reason immediately, and eventually give the treasure.

「I See. Well then, is it okay to think about it for a while ? 」

Being unable to give an answer immediately, Rio tried to get some time before answering.

Another name of Brave Stone is Holy Stone.

Tl : Cnine

Ed : SenjiQ

Pf : Jake1456

Part 1

A few days had passed since Gouki and the others came to the village.

After finishing the general explanation, the technical officers were doing an investigation, aiming at the implementation of the technology by doing this and that.

In the meanwhile, Gouki was hunting along with Rio, taking along Komomo with them.

After that, it came to the almost daily lesson, accompanying Komomo's training with Gouki.

「Rio-sama, you're going to go toward the far west of the land, right ? 」

One day, after their training, Komomo asked that question while peering at Rio's face.

「Yeah, that's right」

Hearing Rio's answer, Komomo let out an innocent smile.

「Uhm ! I, also want to go along with Rio-sama 」

Komomo looked at Rio with a wide smile on her face. [TL : Stooop, Rio don't you dare to break the heart of such innocent Loli!] [ED: Do it! Or bring her to meet the other lolis; they'd love that]

「Is it no good ? 」

Though Komomo's upturned eyes had a charm that might be capable of ensnaring anyone, regardless their gender, Rio somehow resisted it.

「You can't」[TL : NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO]

Rio flatly shook his head with a wry smile.

「Muu.....」

Komomo puffed her cheeks.

Rio was smiling when he looked at her still innocent figure.

「Gouki-dono, please stop luring me by using your daughter」

But, the instigator had to be tightly rebuked.

Rio looked at Gouki's dumbfounded face, who should have been the one that instigated Komomo.

「Mu, seen through, huh?」

Even then, Gouki was still trying to get Rio to consent to accompanying his journey.

Though Rio was rejecting it every time, maybe he thought that it might be possible with Komomo's cuteness, so he was using that method to trap him.

「That's only natural. Even if it's Komomo-chan, it'll become an extremely harsh journey for her who's still young. Please don't say something unreasonable」

「Komomo also mastered the strengthening by using spirit arts. So the long journey will become a good training for her, right」

「No, even if you say it's for training 」

The journey from Yagumo region to the Strahl region was several months of harsh journeying, even for someone who was strengthening their body and physical abilities with spirit arts.

Though the results surely could be called good training, Rio sighed a little to the muscle-brained train of thought and tried to put an end to that kind of training.

And yet Komomo was incorrigible after cheering up, as if she got what she wanted.

「No matter what, I'm going to the Strahl region alone」

Rio would say his resolution, no matter how many times, thus far.

Though it was not that easy to make Gouki give up, even as he said it.

When saying that, Rio somehow gazed towards the sky.

「..... You've already accompanied and chatted till this place, won't you just give up on it?」

But, the answer he heard was outside of his expectation —.

「Ah, okay then 」

Rio replied with a dumbfounded expression to Gouki, who easily gave up on it.

If it was the usual him, he would just throw out one promise after another but, he easily gave up today.

Moreover, he was saying as far as giving up on accompanying him.

What in the world just happened?.

Rio looked at Gouki with slightly dubious expression.

「Mu, I wonder how I'm to accomplish it ? 」

Gouki asked that when he noticed Rio's line of sight.

「Ah, that's not it, if Gouki-dono's okay with it 」 [TLC: あ、いえ、ゴウキ殿がよろしいというのであれば特には.....]

Even while feeling a little uncomfortable, Rio stopped probing too deeply regarding that matter, fearing that he would bring upon himself an unnecessary trouble.

After that, Gouki stopped his requests to travel together, so Rio felt relieved, as if a load of weight had lifted from his chest.



After that, time passed by quickly and in the blink of his eyes it was already fall.

The life in the village ended peacefully, Komomo often came and stayed incognito along with Hayate and Gouki.

The friendly Komomo was adored by the villagers, sticking like glue to Rio day and night and became closer to Ruri like a pair of sisters.

Rio also participated in the trading party that year. Aside from that, he often went alone to royal capital to have secret meetings with Shizuku and Homura.

During that time, as a reward for the agricultural reform, he was being taught of the recipe for the dishes and the specialties of the Karasuki kingdom.

And, he also strolled around the royal capital to buy presents for the people of the Seirei no Tami.

Time passed by, the day of the good harvest festival came again.

Rio decided to leave the village a few days after the good harvest festival.

The comparison of that year and previous year's good harvest was obvious, the atmosphere within the village was very bright, and they were performing a grander banquet than last year as a means of welcoming and sending off Rio.

Rio was cooking the dishes along with the women of the village, with Komomo and Ruri near him.

Sayo, who was a little separated from them, looked on with an envious face.

But, inside her eyes dwelt something, as if she decided something.

They were then going to the village plaza, after the dishes were done.

Shortly after that, the three of them came, they were heading to where Hayate was and had a friendly chat with the four of them.

Naturally Rio was to accompany Komomo, Ruri, who was finished serving the dishes, had nothing to do and accompanied Hayate.

Komomo asking many questions to Rio, and the conversation unfolding while Rio answered her questions.

When they came there, the day already changed to night; Komomo asked many questions related to the Strahl region.

Though he didn't know why she was happy while he told various stories to her, she listened to them with a wide smile on her face.

And then, after that, they were chatting for almost a hour —

「U-Uhm ! Rio-sama! Can I borrow a little of your time? 」

Part 2

Sayo greeted Rio with a somehow extremely tense face.

「Yes. What's matter, Sayo-san? 」

Rio looked a little shocked towards Sayo.

Ever since Shin prostrated as if trying to hold Rio, for some reason Sayo frequently came to Yuba's house.

But, it was not to meet Rio, her purpose was to meet Yuba.

Though he didn't know what she did with Yuba, right then, the flower shaped hairpin she got from Rio one year ago was adorned in her hair.

Looking at that, Rio had a hard to describe feeling that she treated that hairpin as something important, even to that day.

「I've wanted to talk about something for a while」

Even though her gesture seemed timid, Sayo looked at Rio with eyes that were somehow filled with affection.

「Yes. Though I have no problem with it, it's better if it's not in this place, right? 」

Rio asked her, as he vaguely felt it would be bad if there were other people.

「Ye-Yeah. Please, do that, if possible」

「Understood. Well then, let's change the place. Komomo-chan. Sorry but. I'll leave you for a while」

「Y-Yes 」

Komomo answered as if dumbfounded by Rio's words, who left in the circumference.

Just like that, Rio and Sayo moved to a place where there were no people.

Even though every villager gathered in the plaza, they were moving to a place only a little separated from the plaza.

「Well then, what is the talk about ? 」

Rio asked that question after he confirmed that no one was in their surroundings.

「Ah, Yes Uhm About that 」

Her cheeks flushed, though her words seems faltered, she then took a deep breath and opened her mouth, as if gathering her courage.

「Uhm, though it might be troubling by saying it in this way, I About Rio-sama I love you ! [TL : no comment] [ED: Took her more than a year but she did it. Go Sayo!]

Sayo confessed her love to Rio while bowing deeply.

「Sayo-san 」

Rio muttered with troubled voice.

Sayo's body trembled when Rio's voice reached her ears.

Sayo still bowed, as she was somehow unable to brace herself to look at Rio's eyes.

(I wonder how I should I answer her).

(No, the words that should come out have been decided)

But, when he noticed that he was hesitant to say those words, even just a little, Rio's expression soured for an instant.

「I'm sorry. I'm unable to respond to your feelings」

With fists tightly clenched and suppressing the pain in his chest, Rio gave a clear answer with a clear voice to Sayo's confession.

He rejected her confession.

「..... Is that because Rio-sama will leave the village ? 」

「That's right」

Sayo asked that question as she somehow already expected that answer beforehand.

Rio calmly answering Sayo, who was asking with a trembling voice.

「T-Then ! Please take me along with you! 」

Said Sayo with a firm tone.

(My heart must be beating loudly as if it's about to jump out of my chest.) (My face is also flushing as red as tomato.)

That was what she thought.

「Uhhmm.....」

In that moment, Rio didn't know what he should say to Sayo.

「That's impossible」

After pausing for few seconds, though he knew what she meant, the answer had been decided.

Rio answered with a somehow troubled expression.

「It's alright ! I received the teachings on using spirit arts from Yuba-sama, and I can use the simplest spirit arts just recently! 」

After saying that, Sayo approached Rio as if she was about to fall.

It seemed that was the reason Sayo visited Yuba frequently during that half-year.

Rio noticed that he was looking at Sayo with a dumbfounded face.

But, Rio completely didn't know at all.

For what reason Sayo was going as far as that.

It wasn't even one year since they first met.

Though it was not like they never talked, the frequency was just hard to say if it was a conversation.

And despite that, why

Rio was perplexed.

Even though, just a little, Sayo could use spirit arts.

It seemed she was putting a great effort to the degree that she used every single moment to train it everyday.

She was going back and forth to Yuba during that half year.

No human race could use spirit arts with just half year of training. [TL : And you mastered it in just a moment] [ED: and he learnt it without a teacher. Rio not human confirmed]

Even if they were putting a great effort, to the degree of vomiting blood, there was a saying that “The average Human race need more than one year of training before they can use the simplest spirit art”.

And it would take several years before it was usable in combat.

Probably her innate talent was just that great.

That was simply terrifying. [TL : I want him to see a mirror if he’s looking for a monster]

But, just using simple spirit arts was nothing but a hindrance to Rio.

Though that action was something she found as a way forward, her great efforts had come to nothing but a futile effort.

But, he was hesitant to tell that truth to Sayo.

「That’s why, I won’t become a —- 」

「I’m sorry. There’s already someone that I love」

Rio said that with a firm tone, interrupting Sayo’s speech.

He felt sick when he said that.

A girl already occupied that place in his heart.

She was the one loved by Amakawa Haruto.

She, who didn’t exist in that world. [TL : 2D girlfriend?] [ED: May as well be]

But whenever he was thinking of her, he couldn’t bring himself to get closer to other women.

Part 3

He was caught in that eternal prison of an impossible love.

The person himself knew that he was nothing more than a clown —.

Even if he continued living like that in that world without her ——.

Rio and Amakawa Haruto, were loving that girl.

He was unable to lie about that feeling.

Because Amakawa Haruto was the prisoner of his love, his childhood friend, who couldn't move on after his death.

「I-I know about it ! I knew all along. Even so! 」

Sayo was crying with tears overflowing from her lovely eyes.

「Even so, I-I want to go with you ! I want to be always by your side! 」

Sayo was desperate.

She gave all of herself for her first love. [TL : Kussoooo, just end this already!!!]

She could not help but madly fall in love with Rio.

That was why, she was single mindedly thinking only about Rio, and single mindedly putting a great effort for the same reason.

「I-I'll go, no matter how far it is ! I'll walk no matter what kind of road it is! That's why, please don't leave me alone! 」

Rio made a sorrowful face, as he completely understands Sayo's feelings.

It was the first time he was faced with such a straight forward feeling.

「I can't respond to your feelings」

「I-It's okay ! I'm okay even if you didn't turn your eyes to me! It's fine even if you never feel anything either ! But, at least, please let me stay by your side ! 」

Sayo grasped tightly to Rio's hand and never let it go, fearing that she wouldn't be able to see him tomorrow.

「Sayo-san 」

「Please ! 」



Rio was averting his face, as if avoiding the pleading glances of Sayo.

Even so, something impossible would remain impossible.

Rio couldn't take her along with him.

Because he knew that future wasn't a blessed one for her.

Because he was unable to respond to her feelings, forever.

But, how could she be alright just by his side.

Did she understand what would happen if she did that?

「My apologies」

Rio thought very carefully about it, in the end, those words were all he could say.

He regretted his foolish self, which was unable to say more than those words.

Maybe because he felt guilty towards Sayo, or sympathy, or simply because he feels disgusted towards himself.

He didn't know which one it was.

「Fuee Uu Gu Gusu~」

Sayo was starting to cry with, tears rolled down from her eyes as she was unable to bear her first unrequited love.

Sayo knew all along.

It was something she expected.

Somehow or another that first love wouldn't bear any fruit.

But, she couldn't just bear to shut all of the possibilities, even more to deem it as futile or just give up.

She would find a way to reach him.

She also didn't want to restrain Rio.

She talked with Yuba regarding Shin, that prostrated to Rio, because she also knew that nothing would change his mind from leaving the village.

In that case, wasn't it just alright if she accompanied Rio.

With that intention, Sayo decided to learn spirit arts from Yuba.

She must not become a hindrance to him.

She couldn't walk by his side as that current her.

With that kind of goal, Sayo continued to put her greatest effort to the point that she was forgetting about her surroundings.

Recklessly putting her best effort, then he had no choice but to notice her dedication.

That way she continued to do her best in case she was noticed, that way she might have some chance.

Was what she thought.

But, even that was not enough.

Suddenly she was assailed by sense of loss, as if there was a hole in her chest.

「.....」

Rio looked at the crying Sayo with a indescribable expression.

He unintentionally almost put his hand on her shoulder, but he clenched his fists tightly and resisted that urge.

Rio couldn't say anything to that Sayo.

Even if he was saying something nice, it wouldn't do anything to her.

Because he couldn't respond to Sayo's affection, half-baked kindness would only hurt her feelings.

Frowning from the pain in his chest, he turned his heels, and left that place.

「R-Rio-sama, wait 」

「.....」

He didn't reply to Sayo's weak muttering.

Rio walked with firm steps and fading away from Sayo's line of sight.

That distance was so close, and yet hopelessly far.

Sayo, who was at her wit's end, continuously cried in that place.

Quietly, without showing any sign, one shadow was looking at that spectacle

from outside of Rio's range of perception, that shadow approached Sayo with firm steps.

Part 4



Several days later, after finishing saying his farewells to the Saga family, Homura and Shizuku, the day Rio departed from the village had come.

Though the villagers were coming to see him off, there was no figure of Sayo and Shin among them.

The truth was, even the villagers somehow guessing that Sayo's confession was rejected by Rio.

Though some part of him felt lonely with that separation, he knew since a long time ago that he would eventually leave the village.

The villagers somehow were already prepared for it and decided to send him off with smile on their faces.

「See you later, Rio, take care of yourself」

After he finished saying his farewells to the villagers, Ruri approached him last as if bringing an end to his farewell.

There was the figure of Yuba by her back.

Though he already said farewell greetings so many times the previous day, Ruri still let out a lonely smile.

「I'll be happy if I see the figure of my niece or nephew the next time I come to this village」

Rio whispered in small voice as if trying to break this gloomy atmosphere.

「B-Baka ! 」

Ruri yelling loudly at him with flushing red face.

He smiled at her reaction then, looking at Yuba's direction.

「Yuba-san, thank you for your kindness up till now」

「I'm the one who's indebted to you, you know. Thank you, Rio. You can

always come back to this place, any time」

「Yes. Thank you very much」

When they were looking at each other's face, Rio smiled widely with a awkward expression.

Nodding at each other, then the two of them embraced each other.

「Ruri too, thank you very much. I'm really happy that you treated me like your own family, both in name and reality. I'll tell a lot of stories when I come back」

「Of course it is. Because we're cousins, even if no one knows about it」

「Uhn, thank you very much」

They exchanged lines of sight, and let out a small laugh, then embraced each other.

It was only few seconds but, they were embracing tightly.

Even though he felt a little lonely, soon, he would separate from that girl.

「See you later ! Thank you very much for taking care of me, everyone! 」

After saying his farewell for the last time, while bowing deeply to the villagers, Rio turned on his heels.

And just like that, he walked towards the exit of the village.

Rio turned back and waving his hand so many times towards the villagers who sent him off.

And then, looking at the figure of Ruri and the other villagers, he waved his hand for the last time from a far away place with smile on his face.

Year 999 of the Sacred Calendar, Late autumn.

That marked the end of every day life of Rio with Ruri and the others in the village.

Thereupon, they would live separately from then on.

Even so, it didn't mean that they were also separated in their feelings.

Swearing in his heart that they would meet again someday, Rio walked

towards the Strahl region.



One day, one month and few days after Rio departed from the Yagumo region.

Red, Blue, Brown, White, and Yellow colored pillars of light pierced the sky of the Strahl region in Year 1000 of the Sacred Calendar.

(Is someone making holes in the world? I've no doubt, it was that light)

The recollection of that six pillars seen more than a thousand years ago were still clearly in the memory of the observer who still existed even until that current era.

The military forces of the demons that polluted the lands, the ancient heroes[Eiyuu] and the ancient soldiers were the ones who opposed them.

(That fate has been decided a thousand years ago. There's no need to doubt it)

The observer still looked at it.

The six pillar of light that caused an abnormal torrent of mana and odo even caused a quake to the far away lands.

The history repeated itself not so far in the distant future.

Because the history started to move.

Because they're not the one that moved at that time.

There's nothing they can do.

They can do nothing but observe.

The person who was observing the world since the beginning of time was letting out a nostalgic smile and then closed it's eyes. [TL : There's no explanation regarding the gender of the observer, so I'll use "They/Them" for the time being, and it might be just one person or multiple]



The location switched to the mansion of the feudal lord of the Commercial

City in the western part of the Galwark kingdom, Almond.

「That fake legend turned out to be true huh」

The daughter of the duke household Cretia, Liselotte, was muttering dumbfounded while looking at the pillars of light that pierced through the heavens.

That fairy-tale was passed down in the noble families and the royalty.

The six wise gods said to leave behind six holy stones called Brave Stones, along with a certain prophecy in the beginning of the Sacred Calendar, several decades after the end of demon-god war.

「When six pillars of light piercing the heavens of Strahl a thousand years later, the six heroes will come back at the place of the holy stones and bring along an eternal peace」

The six wise gods that left behind that last prophecy then disappeared from human race.

The heroes were the apostles of gods and the hope of humanity.

The number of demonic beings that they slaughtered during the demon-god war was uncountable.

The six wise gods would signal the holy stones, the Brave Stones, to once again summon those heroes.

The endless dispute unfolded regarding which was the most fitting to house the heroes.

And before long, the Brave Stones became the object to show their power.

And now, there was no official record regarding the whereabouts of the six holy stones.

And now the two were in the Bertram kingdom, one in the Galwark kingdom, while another one was in the Saint Stellar kingdom.

Regarding the positions that were known by Liselotte, though the pillars of light rising on the whereabouts of those stones, the two pillars of light rising in Bertram kingdom were a little separated from each other.

「It seemed the holy stones whose whereabouts was unknown rose their pillars at the place, that was considerably far from the Galwark kingdom. Though I think that one unattended follower of the hero was close by」[TLC : 近くて手空きのようでしたら勇者を配下にと考えたんだけど]

Despite there still being some traces of innocence in her features, Liselotte, who was saying that and letting out a “fufufu” laugh, was the owner of light blue coloured hair, along with unworldly beauty comparable to a goddess. [TL : no wonder she become the idol of those lolicon uncle from act 2[the one who sold noodles to Rio]]

Something like unyielding will was transparent in those light blue pupils, that were gazing at the pillar of light.

「I wonder if there's some meaning to the return of the heroes, during such a suspicious time. It seems the monster activity has been increasing lately and a coup d'état occurred in the Bertram kingdom a few days ago. But I don't think that they'll just simply bring world peace. What do you think about it, Aria? 」

Thus, Liselotte asked to her trusted retainer that was in that place.

「Even if I knew, that's the act of the gods. I smell something suspicious in there」

The young woman who was endowed with a beauty equal to Liselotte, Aria Gavaness replied with deadpan face.

「Right. It's not my style to leave matters to chance but, it seems the society won't be easily tricked by that」

A little dejected, Liselotte then said.

「Then, do you have the confidence to win against a legendary hero? 」

「If they have the combat ability like the ones depicted in legend, starting a long distance combat is a little foolish, right? Though I wouldn't know how the result would come out if I bring it to close combat, when the push comes to shove, it's better to not make any moves if there's no chance for victory, right? 」

Aria answered with somewhat a shocked tone, without showing any emotion

on her face, to answer the question thrown by Liselotte.

Sometimes, when Aria's master would ask that kind of playful question, it would be when she already anticipating the result, in accordance with the question.

「Yeah, after all there's no guarantee for the personalities of the heroes. If the heroes appear in the battlefield, there's a high chance that it would cause a war. Basically I have no intention of taking the central stage with you but, we have no choice but to move behind the scenes in case the situation is inclined to one kingdom」

When her trusted retainer gave a satisfying answer, Liselotte added her words.

「Well, even if the war doesn't happen, it'll be hectic days from now on. Because a hero has descended in our kingdom about this time, right」

If the brave stone in the possession of the Galwark kingdom was real, a hero was supposed to be appear in that kingdom too.

Currently there was only one pillar of light rising in the direction of the Galwark kingdom's royal capital.

It seemed the meeting between Liselotte and that hero wouldn't take a long time.

「Regarding the place where the pillar of light rose in the Bertram kingdom, it seems one person ended in the Anti-Revolution camp, right. Because it looks like that the king's government will accept the Anti-Revolution camp, please make preparations to dispatch a messenger and spy. Because they'll surely make a visit to this city if they want to go to the royal capital」

「With pleasure」

Aria quietly disappeared from that place after answering her master.

北山結莉

Yuri Kitayama

Illustrator ◆ Riv

3

✿ 決別の鎮魂歌

精霊 幻想記

【せいれいげんそうき】













「うゝん、お婆ちゃん。おはよゝ」

ルリが寝間着を兼ねた肌着姿のまま、
寝惚け眼で居間に姿を現した。





「あ、ありがとうございます！
リオ様、本当に」

リオは簪の代金を支払ってしまった。
サヨの様子からこの簪が気に入っている
ことは明らかだったので、確認は取れたと
機先を制したのだ。サヨの性格上、
断るであろうことは予想できたから。
サヨはようやく我に返ってきたのか、
ぺこぺここと勢いよくリオに頭を下げだした。











